



HELEN'S VICTORY

BY

MRS. GEORGIE SHELDON

To Helen
Christmas 1912
from Mother.



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HELEN'S VICTORY

OR

HALBURTON LANCASTER'S TEMPTATION

By MRS. GEORGIE SHELDON

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"Nora," "Trixy," "Earle Wayne's Nobility,"

"Brownie's Triumph," "A True Aristocrat,"

"Stella Rosevelt, Etc."



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CHAPTER I.

UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

"BUT, uncle, if you would only allow me to introduce you to Helen, I am sure you could not resist my plea. She is beautiful—as charming a little woman as you could desire to meet——"

"Of course! I never yet knew a young lover who did not go into rhapsodies over the girl who had bewitched him. But, really, you must excuse me from an introduction. I have no desire to meet the—the person."

"She is not a 'person', as you so slightly use the word. She is a perfect little lady."

"Ah, bah! Bob, you have queer ideas of a 'lady', if you regard the daughter of a common dressmaker as such."

Robert Eggleston flushed scarlet, more at the contemptuous tone that his uncle had used than at the slighting words, and for an instant he was tempted to make as scathing a retort. But after silently battling with himself for a moment, he responded in a quiet though repressed tone, which nevertheless betrayed how deeply he had been touched:

"She is a lady, notwithstanding, Uncle Hal."

He was a handsome fellow, of about twenty-five years, his tall, symmetrical, muscular frame showing in every line and movement perfect health and the practised athlete.

He had a fine, open face, with regular, almost patrician, features; a clear, full, blue eye, that looked one squarely in the face when speaking or being spoken to; an intellectual forehead, crowned with a wealth of nut-brown hair; a straight, rather massive, nose, and a tender mouth, which might have been thought rather feminine but for the firm lines about it and the square, determined chin beneath.

Dressed in a stylish business suit, with immaculate linen, in which gleamed a small but pure white stone, and, a simple tie of blue and white, and you have the "tout ensemble" of this fine young man, Robert Payson Eggleston, who was at once the pride and idol of his uncle, Judge Halburton Lancaster, a wealthy lawyer, who had served several terms in the Supreme Court at Washington, D. C., and later established himself in business in New York City.

Mr. Lancaster was himself a distinguished-looking gentleman. He was somewhat massive in form, without being corpulent; rather pale in complexion, with large dark-brown eyes, an intellectual though rather sad face, a firm, stern mouth when his features were in repose, but when he smiled his whole face was illumined into wondrous beauty. His hair was perfectly white, and he possessed a wealth of it, and this added greatly to his distinguished appearance, and of course made him seem, at the first glance, older than he really was.

He was dressed richly and with great care, and looked what he was in fact—an aristocrat, from the crown of his snow-white head to the tips of the highly polished number sevens upon his trim and shapely feet.

He owned a fine estate in Virginia, where he was born and had been reared; a mine in Colorado, the wealth of which was said to be inestimable, and an elegant residence in New York, in which city his business was located, and where he lived during most of the year.

Robert Eggleston was the son and only child of Mr. Lancaster's adopted sister, whom the man had idolized. Adele Lancaster had been engaged to a young captain in the regular army, who, at the breaking out of the Civil War, had pleaded that she would become his wife.

Her parents would not consent to the union, even though they honored and respected the young man as a man, because he felt that his place was with the army of the North; so the lovers parted almost heart-broken, he to go to his post on the Potomac, she to bear the cruel separation with what fortitude she could.

Both parents died during that first year, and Adele, through the influence of her brother, Halburton Lancaster, who occupied a prominent position in the Southern army, was sent to New York, to reside with a distant relative until hostilities should cease.

Here Robert Eggleston sought her during a brief furlough, and the lovers were married, with the full consent of Adele's adopted brother, who, with rare fidelity, still retained his friendship for the playmate of his childhood in spite of the general bitterness which prevailed between the North and the South.

The young captain returned to his regiment after a short but blissful honeymoon spent with his young bride, and was killed a month later in one of the fiercest battles of the war.

Poor Adele was somewhat comforted when her son was born. She named him Robert Payson Eggle-

ton, for his father, and for five long years did her best to instil into his young mind a love for truth and all that was noble in life. Then she laid down her burden, for her heart had been slowly breaking with its weight of grief, and left her boy as a precious legacy to her brother.

Halburton Lancaster, who had loved his adopted sister as few brothers love an own sister, tenderly and solemnly assumed the responsibility, and having recently had an experience in his own life that had in less than a month turned his hair, young as he was, snow white, he devoted himself heart and soul to the work of rearing and educating his ward, upon whom he seemed to bestow the wealth of affection which otherwise he might have expended in other channels.

He never referred to his own disappointed hopes, but as he grew toward manhood, Bob realized that the man must have been desperately wounded during his early years, for he shunned society, especially that of women, and seldom referred, even, to the gentler sex, and when he did it was with a singular note of bitterness in his tones.

The boy worshipped his uncle, who was his ideal of a grand and noble-minded man, and his highest ambition was to become like him.

"Uncle Hal is the handsomest man, the best and smartest man I ever have seen," he was wont to say when speaking of his guardian to others.

The first tiff had occurred upon the occasion of Bob's graduation from the high school, when he had taken the first honors and acquitted himself most brilliantly.

Mr. Lancaster, proud of his attainments, attended all the exercises, and even acceded to his request to accompany him to the grand reception on the evening

following the commencement in spite of his distaste for society.

During these festivals he observed that Bob was very attentive to a charming young girl of sylph-like form and a face of creamy whiteness, with delicate, clear-cut features; great, gazelle-brown eyes, and a wealth of nut-brown hair, which hung in a massive braid between her shoulders, and was tied with a wide, rich, blue satin ribbon.

She was simply dressed in white India muslin, most daintily made, with a broad sash of the same material, and no ornament or color anywhere about her, save the vivid scarlet of her smiling lips and the blue hair-ribbon.

Bob danced with her oftener than with any one else in the room, and had lingered by her side between times in the most devoted way—circumstances which excited both the amusement and curiosity of Mr. Lancaster.

“Alton, who is that young miss dancing with Bob?” he inquired of a young man whom he knew, and who was also a member of the graduating class.

Hubert Alton had himself been absorbed in watching the young couple, who were apparently oblivious to all save the presence of each other, and at the question a sudden pallor and a frown of deep displeasure darkened his brow.

“That is Miss Seymour, sir,” he briefly replied.

“And who is Miss Seymour?” smilingly pursued Mr. Lancaster.

“Mis Helen Seymour, sir. She has just completed her first year in the high school.”

“Smart?” queried the elder gentleman.

“The brightest one in her class, and a great favorite with the whole school,” returned Alton, flushing hotly, but with his burning eyes fastened hungrily upon the pure, oval face.

"But who is she—who are her parents? What is her social standing?" persisted Mr. Lancaster.

"She has no father, sir; her mother is a fashionable dressmaker on — Street," replied Alton, studying the man's aristocratic face from beneath his still lowering brows.

"Ah!" briefly ejaculated his companion. But his finely chiseled nostrils dilated with unmistakable scorn.

The next morning, while they were at breakfast, Mr. Lancaster laughingly remarked:

"Well, Bob, I understand that you have become interested in fashionable dressmaking."

Bob shot a glance of surprise at his companion; then the telltale blood mounted to his brow as he noted his quizzical expression, while at the same time a tender smile curved the corners of his handsome mouth.

"Who told you?" he queried, thinking it best to treat the matter as a joke, as his uncle seemed inclined to do.

"Oh, I learned the fact last night. Naturally, when I saw you so devoted to a certain young lady, I thought it best to make some inquiries regarding her antecedents," responded the elder gentleman, with a touch of irony.

Bob looked gravely into his plate for a moment; then he quietly observed:

"I know nothing about Helen Seymour's antecedents, as you express it, except that her mother is a widow, and has supported herself and her daughter for many years by doing dressmaking for other people."

"Humph! Have you ever met Mrs. Seymour?" queried Mr. Lancaster.

"Yes, but once only. When Elton White was here visiting last winter, you remember, I went with him

to — church. As we were leaving the church, we met the Seymours, when Helen introduced us to her mother. Mrs. Seymour is a most beautiful woman."

"As charming as her daughter?" inquired Mr. Lancaster, with slightly curling lips.

"Even more so," said Rob, but flushing again at the derisive smile. "She carries herself like a queen. Yet, though her face is surpassingly lovely, it is the saddest face I have ever seen."

"Does Miss Helen resemble her mother?"

"Not in the least, except perhaps in manner. Mrs. Seymour is very fair, with dark-blue eyes and golden-brown hair. She is taller and stouter than Helen. She is very dignified, even distinguished, in her bearing, and——"

"And what?" as Rob hesitated.

"You could not fail to know, should you see her, that she is a perfect lady in every sense of the word."

"In spite of the dressmaking, eh?"

"Yes, sir—in spite of her occupation," said Rob, with uplifted head and a flash in his eyes that his uncle had seldom encountered there.

Then, setting his firm chin a trifle more firmly, he inquired:

"What is there that is objectionable, Uncle Hal, in a woman whom the force of circumstances has left in a destitute condition, earning her living by making dresses for other women?"

"Nothing whatever, Rob. I would not presume to object to anything that this Mrs. Seymour might see fit to do, but I should object very seriously to having my nephew become involved in any copartnership with such—such people," was the somewhat supercilious response.

Once again Rob flushed, and this time furiously.

"Were you offended, Uncle Hal, because I danced with Helen Seymour last night?" he questioned, after

a moment of thought, and bending a clear, straightforward glance upon his companion.

"I could never be angry with you, Rob, for showing due courtesy to your friends and acquaintances; but such devoted attentions to a person in Miss Seymour's position, I regard as unwise, to say the least, and should advise their immediate discontinuance."

Rob might have borne this rather unpleasant piece of advice with becoming meekness but for the obnoxious phrase, "a person in Miss Seymour's position." That galled him almost beyond endurance, for he had already become very fond of the fair girl.

He grew as suddenly pale as he had been red a moment before.

"Uncle Hal," he began, in a tone that was dangerously calm, "do you know I think that money never really makes position, and if I live to be a hundred years old, and Helen Seymour—who is one of the brightest and loveliest girls I know—will honor me so far, I shall be proud of her friendship and deem no attention misbestowed."

After this shaft he vigorously fell to dissecting his chop, while Mr. Lancaster, shooting a look of surprise, mingled with something of amusement, at the fair Helen's brave young champion, quietly helped himself to another roll, and then discreetly changed the subject, and plans for the vacation were soon under a lively discussion.

Helen Seymour was never mentioned again, by either, until the morning on which our story opens.

Rob went to college in the autumn after leaving the high school, but not before he had called upon Helen to bid her adieu and beg the privilege of writing to her occasionally, a favor which she granted with a shy blush and smile that set his heart fluttering with both hope and pleasure.

The four years flew by, Rob doing excellent work.

Helen also finished her course in the high school, and had taken one year in the Normal Art by the time the young man had taken his degree.

Meantime their correspondence had flourished until, with various meetings during the several vacations, the young people had become acknowledged lovers, and thus it happened one morning, shortly after his return from college, while they were discussing his future career, that Rob confessed his affection for Helen, and solicited Mr. Lancaster's consent to their engagement.

He had been met with an emphatic refusal, and then there had followed the argument as quoted at the beginning of the chapter.

"Yes, she is a lady in every sense of the word," Rob reiterated, with increasing earnestness. "She is well educated, even talented, having taken the scholarship for the coming year in the art school."

"Ah! that surely speaks well for her," said Mr. Lancaster indifferently, adding: "Possibly she intends to make art her profession?"

"She has every encouragement from her teachers to do so if—if it should be necessary for her to choose a profession," Rob returned, flushing.

"And it surely will be quite a step upward from her mother's trade," pursued Mr. Lancaster, with a slight curl of his fine lips.

Rob lifted his clear eyes, and fixed them full upon the man's face.

"Uncle Hal, I think you are rather cruel to me," he said, with a note of passion in his tones. "I love Helen with all my heart—she is my life; she is brighter and more cultivated than half the young ladies whom I meet in 'our circle,' so-called. Her mother is also a lady; she speaks three languages fluently, and during her early life was a belle in society, and even spent some time in Europe. When, after her marriage, she

was reduced to poverty by circumstances, regarding which I know nothing, she simply had to go to work for herself and child, or starve. Uncle Hal, surely you do not think it ignoble or degrading for one to work honorably for one's living when one must?" the young man concluded, with proudly uplifted head, and looking him squarely in the eye in a way that seemed to search him through and through, and with something of anxiety and disappointment in the gaze.

"No, Rob, I do not think honorable employment degrading to any one; but——"

"Well, but what?" demanded Rob, with some impatience, as the man paused with a thoughtful expression.

"But people seldom reared in poverty and with the necessity for work are seldom fitted to occupy a more exalted position in life. You have been trained to observe all the finer courtesies and etiquette of polite society, and I know that it would be exceedingly mortifying to you, as well as to me, to be handicapped with a wife who was not your equal in these respects. As my nephew and heir, your prospects for the future are very flattering, and it is my desire to have you marry a woman your equal, both financially and socially," Mr. Lancaster gravely returned.

"But I already love Helen Seymour—I could make no other woman my wife," said Rob earnestly.

"You may imagine that you love her; but I feel sure that the attachment is nothing more than a school-boy-and-girl fancy, which you will both soon outgrow."

"A school-boy-and-girl fancy!" Rob repeated, in tones quivering with repressed passion. "Heaven! Uncle Hal, were you ever in love? Why have you never married?"

"Was I ever in love! My God!" broke startlingly upon the ears of the young man in tones that he

would never have recognized, and he glanced up to find his uncle pale as death and his face convulsed with agony.

"Uncle Hal!" he cried in alarm, "in mercy tell me, what have I done?"

"Nothing, Rob, nothing," returned the man, quickly recovering himself. Then he added, in a bitter and peculiar tone: "Was I ever in love? Why did I never marry? Well, I will tell you that I had my romance in my youth, and so have fought shy of womankind ever since; but we will change the subject, if you please, and never refer to it again," he concluded, with still pale, tremulous lips.

"Forgive me, sir, if I have wounded you," said Rob regretfully, "but I cannot change the subject until I have your answer to my question."

"Then here you have it, Robert; I can never sanction your union with Miss Seymour," said Mr. Lancaster, in tones of stern decision.

There was a moment of silence, during which the two men looked steadfastly into each other's eyes.

At last Rob arose and stood, tall and straight and resolute, before the elder gentleman.

"Then I shall marry her without it," he returned, with a quiet deliberateness that bespoke an unconquerable determination.

CHAPTER II.

ROB'S RESOLUTION.

MR. LANCASTER shot one swift, comprehensive glance at the resolute young man before him, and he saw by his pale, set face and the steadfast look in his eyes that he meant every word that he uttered.

His own chin was rigid, plainly showing that he had no intention of yielding the stand which he had taken. But Halburton Lancaster was a shrewd and tactful man. He realized that opposition invariably awakened antagonism, and he bethought himself that it might be wise to extemporize with this resolute lover and so perhaps gain his point by means of strategy.

At the same time he was curious to know what Rob's attitude would be in the event of being suddenly deprived of all financial resources, and after a moment, he quietly questioned:

"How would you support your wife, Rob, if you should marry, as you threaten to do?"

Rob grew suddenly hot, then cold.

He was quick to grasp the point that if he married contrary to his uncle's wishes he might be cut off with the proverbial shilling; that he might thus forfeit all right and title to the fortune of that gentleman, whose heir he had hitherto been regarded by every one.

But his feeling of dismay was only momentary; he did not falter in his loyalty to the girl he loved.

"I would work for her, and feel myself honored in

so doing," he proudly returned, after a moment of profound silence.

Mr. Lancaster regarded him earnestly for a minute after this gallant assertion, and was impressed by the beauty, nobility, and determination written on his young face.

He saw that Rob possessed a will every whit as strong as his own, and, while he did not intend to retract one iota from the stand he had taken, he could not bear the thought of an open rupture with the boy whom he idolized.

A sudden scheme took form in his fertile brain.

Rising from his chair, he went up to him, laid both hands upon his shoulders, and said with his rare smile:

"Rob, you and I are not going to quarrel after all these years, during which not a cloud has risen between us! I could not bear that. Now, I have a plan which I have been meditating upon for some time to propose to you, and I think it will be well to let this other matter rest for awhile. Of course, you are not ready to marry yet—not under a year or two, at any rate; meantime, I want you to come with me to Europe before you settle down to the real business of life. Suppose we spend a year abroad, then—if you are of the same mind when you return—there will be ample time to settle this question of marriage. What do you say?"

Rob lifted his earnest eyes to his uncle's face and studied it critically.

The fine brown eyes met his squarely and smiled back fondly, tenderly almost as a woman's, at him, and, without a suspicion of double-dealing, with only love and gratitude welling up in his heart for this man who had ever been his ideal of all that was grandest and best in humankind, who had been both

father and mother to him, he replied with a quaver of deep emotion in his tones:

"I say that I will accede to your plan with all my heart, and I think that you are just the best old fellow that ever lived."

"All right, my boy; then we will call that matter settled," said Mr. Lancaster, in a tone of satisfaction, adding: "I can easily arrange my business to make an early start, and we will sail a week from Saturday by the —, which, I am told, is the fastest and best steamer that plies between New York and Liverpool. Now, make your own arrangements with all possible despatch, and we will have a long, happy holiday after your four years of hard study, and polish you off with plenty of travel and sight-seeing. Are you perfectly satisfied with the plan?"

"More than satisfied, Uncle Hal," Rob gratefully responded.

"Very well. Now, I have several letters to write and must get about them immediately," saying which he gave Rob a hearty slap upon the back and then left the room.

Our young hero did not quite like the idea of leaving for Europe in such a hurry. He would have preferred to postpone the trip until after the summer vacation, for he had hoped to spend the months of July and August in a quiet spot among the Adirondacks, where he knew that Helen and her mother owned a cottage and went for a few weeks of every year.

But he felt that he must yield this point to his uncle's wishes and plans, since he had conceded(?) so much to him and was doing so much for his pleasure.

He was more reconciled to the project of going abroad than he otherwise would have been had it not been for the fact that Helen had another year before her in the Art School; and he felt that the twelve months spent in travel and sight-seeing would pass

more quickly than in almost any other way, while he told himself that he could hear from the girl he loved by every steamer, and that their correspondence would be a source of great comfort and delight to him.

That evening found him in Mrs. Seymour's pretty parlor eager to relate to that lady and Helen his uncle's plans for the coming year.

Both mother and daughter were clad in dainty and spotless white; the former, a magnificent woman of about forty-two years, with a splendidly developed figure, a fair, high-bred face, its delicate clear-cut features full of intellect and expression; large, dark-blue eyes that thrilled one with their direct and earnest gaze; a broad, intellectual forehead, surmounted by a wealth of golden hair, that was most tastefully and becomingly arranged and fastened with an exquisitely wrought, golden comb.

Her dress was of finest and sheerest lawn, trimmed with Valenciennes lace and insertion, and decorated with knots and bows of pale lavender ribbon. She made a lovely picture in it, and, for a moment, Rob was inclined to think she was almost as beautiful as her daughter.

Helen was more simply robed, and wore rose-pink ribbons, which were exceedingly becoming to her clear complexion and dark hair and eyes.

Both ladies greeted Rob with undisguised pleasure, while Helen's blush and shy, fond glance betrayed something of the deeper emotion which thrilled her heart for her handsome and manly lover.

"I have great news for you," the young man remarked, after he had accepted the great willow rocker offered him, and regaled himself with a glass of iced lemonade from the cooler.

"News!" repeated Helen, glancing at him with an eager little laugh which revealed two rows of white,

faultless teeth, "do gratify our curiosity at once. Mamma and I have been so dull and lazy all day—it has been too warm for any exertion—and a little gossip will be such a treat. Eh, dearie?" she concluded, with a mischievous glance at the elder lady.

Mrs. Seymour smiled indulgently at her daughter's merry mood, while she at the same time shook her head in mock reproof.

She had always rigidly refused to listen to or encourage the slightest word or spirit of gossip.

"Stop, Helen!" she would peremptorily say when, as a child, she would come eagerly into her mother's presence with some startling news or story or complaint; "if you have something good to tell me about your mates or teachers I will gladly hear it, but not one word against any one. Deprecate and correct your own faults as much as you choose, my darling, but speak only of the virtues of, and cultivate charity for, others."

And this was the spirit of the woman whom Halburton Lancaster had so slightly designated as a "person" when discussing her with Rob.

"Well, then," said the young man, thinking it wise to have his announcement over with as soon as possible, "my uncle has decided to make a tour of Europe and wishes me to accompany him.

"Going to Europe!" cried Helen, with suddenly paling lips and a sinking heart.

"Yes," said Rob, repressing a sigh and meeting her startled look with one of fond regret.

"When—do you go?" queried the girl, tears starting to her eyes in spite of her effort and self-control.

"We expect to sail a week from Saturday."

"So soon! Isn't—Isn't it a very sudden fitting?" faltered Helen.

"Yes. I knew nothing of the plan until to-day."

"Then you will not be able to come to the Adiron-

dacks while we are there this summer," and Helen felt as if she could hardly bear the disappointment.

"No, I shall have to forego that pleasure," said Rob regretfully and with a slight quaver which told his fair listener that the sacrifice would be no light one on his part.

"How long does your uncle propose to remain abroad, and what countries will he visit?" Mrs. Seymour inquired, with more of interest than she usually manifested regarding strangers.

Hers had been such a busy life that she had but very little thought to bestow upon any one outside her daughter and her customers.

There were from four to six weeks during the hottest of the summer that she insisted upon taking a rest and a holiday, as much for the sake of giving the child, whom she idolized, a change as because of the need of recuperating her own wasted energies before the rush of the fall season came upon her.

Of course, she lived in and for Helen—she was her one object in life. She had reared her most carefully and, as yet, had seldom allowed her to mingle in society, although she had always encouraged her to invite her school friends to make merry in her own house as often as she chose.

In this way Rob had become a not infrequent visitor in their pretty apartment, for, after his first invitation, he had been only too eager to avail himself of their cordial "come again."

Mrs. Seymour had been pleased with him from the outset, and, as time went on, had grown to like him right well. She knew that he was an orphan and had been reared by an uncle whom, for some inexplicable reason, she had confounded with a certain physician by the name of Eggleston and who had acquired a distinguished position in the city.

Of late it had begun to dawn upon her that Rob

and Helen were becoming deeply interested in each other, but she had been too busy to give more than a passing thought to the matter, and to tell herself that when her time of leisure came, and he, with several other friends of Helen's, followed them to the Adirondacks, as had been planned, she must study the young man more thoroughly, and ascertain, if possible, something about his family.

It was evident to her that he had been carefully reared; that he was an innate gentleman, possessing noble and manly traits, together with a winning and genial manner, that made him a most enjoyable companion, and one whom she always welcomed most graciously.

Rob's plan, when he had talked with his uncle that morning, had been to obtain his sanction to an engagement with Helen and come to some definite understanding regarding his future career in business, and then formally ask Mrs. Seymour to give him her daughter.

He had been disappointed in some respects, as we know, but he had no intention of relinquishing his main object, as we shall see later.

"I think Uncle Hal intends to remain away a year or so," he remarked, in reply to Mrs. Seymour's question, "but I know nothing as yet regarding our proposed route. The proposition took me entirely by surprise this morning, and as he was quite busy, I did not like to detain him then with questions."

They all chatted for some time regarding the prospective trip, Mrs. Seymour speaking familiarly of various countries which she had visited, and relating several interesting incidents connected with her travels.

At length she slipped out of the room to attend to some domestic duty, whereupon Rob arose and seated himself upon the divan beside Helen.

"My darling," he said, gathering her hands into his, "I cannot tell you how disappointed I am to have to go away across the ocean just at this time when we had planned such delightful things for the summer; but, my uncle having arranged this trip as much for my pleasure and benefit as his own, I, of course, do not feel at liberty to make any objections. But you will not forget me, sweet; I know that you will be true to me, even though the sea may divide us for a year."

"Indeed I shall not forget you, Rob, and you know that I shall be true to you. How could the shadow of a doubt arise in your mind?" returned Helen, with a note of tender reproof in her tones.

"I do not doubt you, dearest; I simply yearned to have the confirmation of my hopes from your own lips," said Rob, with a luminous smile, adding: "You are mine, Helen; you have given yourself to me—you will be my wife and I may claim this dear hand when I return?" and he lifted it as he clasped and laid it softly against his lips.

"I have pledged my whole heart's love for you, Rob, and I shall never retract one word of what I have told you," the fair girl gravely replied. "But ——" she added, hesitatingly.

"But what, love?"

"But will your uncle approve your choice?" she continued, searching his face earnestly, "and then, there is mamma's sanction to be obtained."

Rob flushed slightly at this with something like guilt. While he would not willingly deceive Helen regarding Mr. Lancaster's attitude, he nevertheless did not feel it necessary to rehearse to her what had passed between them that morning, for he firmly believed that his uncle would not withhold his consent to their union when, at the end of a year, he

should find that they were still of the same mind and faithful to each other.

"I have already spoken to Uncle Hal, dear," he said, after a moment of thought, "and, while I am obliged to confess that he did not appear very enthusiastic regarding my taking upon myself the responsibilities of married life, he told me that if you and I were of the same mind upon my return I might renew my plea. As for Mrs. Seymour's sanction, I intended to consult her upon the subject and ask her permission to put this upon your finger."

"This" was a pure white stone of great brilliancy, set in a heavy hoop of golden wire, which he drew from a tiny white velvet case.

"Oh, Rob! how perfectly lovely!" exclaimed Helen eagerly, a beautiful flush dyeing her cream-like face. "But," she added doubtfully, "I am not sure that mamma will be willing to ratify an engagement between us."

"Here she comes; I'll put the question to her here and now," smilingly responded Rob, and rising as Mrs. Seymour at that moment re-entered the room.

"And what is this important question?" she laughingly demanded, yet half suspecting the truth as she looked into his eager, handsome face.

In a manly, straightforward way Rob told the story of his love for Helen, also what he had related to her regarding his interview with his uncle that morning, and ended by begging her to promise him that Helen should become his wife upon his return from Europe.

Mrs. Seymour grew grave as she listened. She shrewdly reasoned that if the young man's guardian had been in full sympathy with his nephew, the least he could have done would have been to seek an introduction and a personal interview with herself and the lady of Rob's choice.

"I think," she said, after a thoughtful pause, when the eager lover ceased, "it would be unwise to bind either of you during this prospective separation. I am honored and proud, Mr. Eggleston, that you have asked me for Helen," she continued, with a charming smile, "for I like you right well, and know no one whom I should prefer as a son-in-law. But Helen has another year at school before her, and I believe it will be best for her to remain unfettered meanwhile; so just leave matters as they are, and if at the end of the year you are both of the same mind, I will not say you nay."

"But the ring, dear Mrs. Seymour; may not Helen wear my ring while I am away?" Rob questioned, his face paling as he held out the costly gem before her.

"No, not as a pledge that shall bind either of you," she gently but firmly replied. Then, as she saw the look of appeal in her darling's eyes, she added: "But if she cares to wear it, on the other hand, as a simple souvenir of friendship, I will not object."

"Thank you; thank you! I am truly grateful for that concession," said Rob, his countenance lighting up with pleasure, and turning quickly to Helen, he slipped the jewel upon the third finger of her right hand; then, lifting it, sealed his act with a mute caress of his lips.

In spite of the conditions imposed upon them, the act was to both lovers a solemn pledge of faithful love for all time.

CHAPTER III.

MR. LANCASTER MEETS MISS SEYMOUR.

A FEW days later Helen and two of her schoolgirl friends went for a canter in Central Park.

They had been taking riding lessons all the spring, were enthusiastic over the sport, and frequently went out together for a couple of hours in the morning, a groom, of course, always accompanying them.

They made a lovely trio upon their sleek, spirited though gentle steeds, in their trim habits and stylish hats, with their bright faces gleaming with enjoyment, while their fresh young voices and happy laughter rang out like music upon the clear air, attracting admiring glances and smiles from many a passer-by.

They were cantering briskly along a shaded avenue, without a thought of danger, the groom some little distance in the rear, when, on suddenly rounding a turn in the road, they came, without sign or warning, upon an elegant trap drawn by a pair of magnificent bays, and in which two gentlemen, besides the driver, were seated.

Helen was leading the others, but, although she drew rein quickly and tried to get out of the way, the span was coming with such speed that they almost ran her down, and, her horse shying to one side, she was thrown upon the turf, where she lay white and motionless.

One of the gentlemen, with a low exclamation of dismay, leaped out over the wheels, which had not yet ceased to revolve—although the driver was doing his utmost to bring his startled horses to a standstill—

and sprang toward the inanimate form upon the greensward.

But, agile as he had been, another was before him.

A young man, who had been seated beneath the shade of a large tree reading the morning news, dashed his paper to the ground, bounded forward, and the next moment, with a groan of horror, had gathered the graceful form into his arms and laid the glossy head upon his breast.

"Helen Seymour! My darling—oh, God! have they killed you?" he was murmuring with white lips and in tremulous tones just as the recent occupant of the trap reached the spot and caught the passionately uttered words.

The gentleman was none other than the aristocratic Halburton Lancaster, who had been showing a friend around the park, and he viewed the young man and the unconscious girl with undisguised astonishment.

"Hubert Alton!" he exclaimed, "do you know this young lady?"

"Yes, she is Miss Helen Seymour," replied Alton, lifting a pair of anguished eyes to his questioner, while he vigorously chafed the limp hands of the helpless girl.

"Helen Seymour!" repeated Mr. Lancaster, with a great inward shock, while he studied the fair, still face with curious, earnest eyes, and told himself it was no wonder that Rob had fallen in love with it, for he found himself strangely fascinated by its delicate outlines and exquisite beauty. "Is she the same young miss whom you pointed out to me, and with whom Rob danced so frequently at the high-school commencement reception four years ago?" he inquired, after a moment of silence.

"Yes," briefly returned Alton, and with a clouding brow, as he recalled what pangs he had suffered from jealousy on that memorable occasion.

"Do you think she has been seriously injured by her fall?" queried the elder man, with manifest anxiety, as he bent lower over the still form.

He was a tender-hearted man, in spite of his pride, and he could not bear the thought that the girl should suffer violence through his agency, indirect though it might have been, and innocent as he was of any desire to harm her personally.

He did not wish his nephew to marry a "nobody," and was determined that he should not; at the same time he would not have caused the girl a single physical pang.

Before Hubert Alton could reply Helen's great brown eyes flashed wide open and she drew a long, deep breath.

"Oh! where am I?" she questioned. "Ah!" as she glanced into the pale, anxious face bending over her, "Mr. Alton! Why! what does this mean?"

A crimson flush suffused her whole face as she realized that she was reclining in the arms of a young gentleman in such a public place, in broad daylight, and in the presence of several other people.

The next instant she had struggled to a sitting posture and released herself from his supporting embrace.

"Are you hurt, Miss Seymour?" young Alton inquired, in a voice that was far from steady; for, for a moment, he had feared that the girl was dead, and for years he had secretly loved her with all the passion of his nature, "you were thrown from your horse a few moments ago," he added, in explanation.

"Oh, yes, I remember," said Helen, with a quick, indrawn breath and paling again, "I ran into a span of horses just at the turn. No, I think I am not hurt," she went on, making a swift mental inventory of her various joints and members and finding no aches or pains, "I was careless to be riding so fast; I should

have been more on my guard on a winding road; but I recall that I slipped my foot from my stirrup, just as Kitty shied, and made a spring from the saddle. That is the last I knew; the shock and the fright must have made me unconscious for a moment. I hope my friends met with no harm and that no damage was done to the team," she concluded, glancing anxiously around.

"Never mind the team, Miss Seymour—though, for that matter, it is all right—and the other young ladies are safe. See! they have just fastened their horses to yonder tree and are coming to look after you," replied Mr. Alton, glancing over his shoulder. Then he added, while he scanned her face eagerly, "just assure me that you are unharmed; have you no pains, no bruises or sprains?"

"Not a pain—not a bruise, Mr. Alton," replied Helen, but with a somewhat nervous laugh, "though I admit I am a bit shaken by the shock of my fall."

She attempted to rise as she spoke, when her companion sprang to his feet and almost lifted her upon her own.

"Thank you," she said, flushing again as she slipped from his sustaining arms, "I am all right now."

"Come to yonder seat," said the young man, and he led her to where he had been sitting when the accident occurred.

Helen's friends followed her with pale faces and fearful hearts, for they had been terribly frightened by the mishap, while the groom himself was evidently considerably disturbed. Mr. Lancaster also moved in the same direction, with thoughtful face and anxious eyes. He was determined to assure himself that all was well with the girl before rejoining his friend, who had remained in the trap which the driver had drawn to one side, and, having quieted his steeds, was now patiently awaiting his master's movements.

Strange as it may seem, Helen had not sustained even a scratch, and was fast regaining her strength and spirits. She had, as she said, with rare presence of mind, released her foot from the stirrup, and, having broken her fall by a spring and alighted upon the thick turf, had thus doubtless saved herself from being seriously injured.

"Pray do not look so alarmed, Mr. Alton," she observed, as she sank upon the rustic seat, while the young man bent anxiously over her and begged her to tell him what he could do for her. Should he not summon a physician to make sure that she was all right, or call a carriage to take her home?

"No, indeed," she asserted brightly; "believe me, I am in perfect condition. I will rest here for a few minutes. Meantime, if you will kindly ascertain what has become of my horse I shall be grateful; then I will remount and go on."

The pretty little mare was in plain sight. She was a gentle creature, and had gone quietly to browsing upon the luxuriant greensward as soon as she found herself at liberty, and was apparently as unconcerned as if nothing had happened and she had a perfect right to be there, instead of being a trespasser upon forbidden ground, while the groom was at that very moment cautiously approaching to recapture her.

Mr. Lancaster now approached Helen and courteously observed:

"Surely, Miss Seymour, you will not attempt to remount your horse after your accident! You cannot fail to be somewhat unnerved, to say the least, by having been so rudely unseated, and my carriage is at your disposal. My man shall drive you home and the groom will see that your horse is returned to its stable. I certainly owe you some reparation after having caused you so much discomfort."

Helen had regarded him earnestly but with a puzzled expression while he was speaking.

His countenance seemed strangely familiar. She was sure that she had seen him somewhere before, but failed to place him.

She thought him a wonderfully handsome and distinguished-looking man, with his fine, upright form, his high-bred face, and snow-white hair.

He had lifted his hat as he addressed her, for he instinctively recognized her as the lady which Rob had insisted that she was, and she seemed to compel the act of civility.

"Thank you, sir," she courteously responded, and with a charming smile, "but I have no intention of going home; I am perfectly able to continue my ride with my friends, and I am not going to have their morning spoiled. Pray do not be troubled, any of you," she added, glancing into the still anxious faces around her. "I positively am not hurt the least little bit. Here, Flossy, give me my hat"—turning to one of her companions who had rescued her chapeau—"and now," with a bright little laugh, "you will have to be my looking-glass and tell me if I get it on straight. There!" with a coquettish toss of her bright head as she adjusted it, "am I all right?"

She was assured that she was, while everybody was smiling admiration at her pluck, her lovely face, and pretty ways.

"Now, Mr. Alton," she continued, turning to the young man, with a blush, for she could not forget how recently she had been reclining in his arms, "will you kindly tell the groom that I am ready to remount?"

"Certainly; I will obey any behest with pleasure," he replied; "but"—in an appealing tone—"I wish you might be persuaded to accept this gentleman's offer and allow his man to take you home."

"Pray do, Miss Seymour; it would be a great relief

to my mind to know that you were being taken safely home. I cannot bear the thought of having you remount your horse, quiet and gentle though she seems," Mr. Lancaster urged, with great earnestness.

"Thank you; you are both considerate and kind," Helen returned, in an appreciative tone, "but"—with quiet dignity and determination—"I prefer to continue my ride with my friends."

There was, of course, nothing more to be said after that, especially as the fair girl supplemented her words with an imperative gesture to the groom to bring her horse.

Mr. Lancaster personally inspected the saddle and girths to assure himself that everything was safe, then assisted her and her companions to remount, when, bidding the gentlemen good morning, the trio rode away with their escort, and apparently none the worse for the exciting incident that had so recently occurred.

Mr. Lancaster and young Alton stood watching them until they disappeared around another turn in the avenue, and then the elder man faced his companion and remarked, while he searched his countenance critically:

"It is a long time, Alton, since I have seen you. Where have you kept yourself all these years?"

"In Boston, Mass., where I spent two years at a commercial college, then went to clerking it for an uncle," the young man replied.

"Ah! then you must have gone to Boston soon after leaving the high school!"

"Yes, sir; I lost my father a short time afterward. He died poor, and my uncle wrote that if I would come to him he would give me a lift. I was his confidential clerk for two years, but he went all to smash about a month ago and I was thrown upon my own resources again," Hubert explained.

"Are you out of business now?" inquired Mr. Lancaster, a bright thought(?) thrilling him as he recalled the passionate words the young man had breathed as he held Helen Seymour's unconscious form in his arms.

"Yes, and I am almost upon my uppers, to use a suggestive phrase," Alton responded, with a tinge of bitterness in his tones. "I have walked miles and miles during the last week in search of something to do, but as yet have failed to find a situation."

"Ah! that must have been discouraging, I am sure," kindly returned the elder gentleman. Then, after a moment of thoughtful silence, he continued: "I wonder if I cannot help you to another start. Suppose you come around to my office, 63 — Street, at four this afternoon. I shall be at liberty then and we will talk the matter over together."

Hubert Alton flashed a look of mingled surprise and gratitude upon his companion, while he wondered what could have aroused this unaccountable interest in one whom he had only known very slightly when, as a boy, he used to go around to Rob Eggleston's palatial home, where they got out their problems in algebra together.

"Thank you, sir; you are very kind, and I will be prompt to keep the appointment," he said, with a thrill of earnest feeling in his tones, for he had been well-nigh discouraged when he had come out to the park—for the want of something better to do—that morning.

Mr. Lancaster then wished him good day, and, turning, went back to his trap, sprang in, agile almost as a boy, beside his friend, and was driven back toward the city.

But the beauty of the day seemed to have suddenly departed for the wealthy and high-toned lawyer, even though the sun still shone as bright and all nature

was in its freshest array; for the temptation of the man's life had come to him during that fateful half hour, when he had looked upon and recognized the beauty and worth of the fair girl whom his nephew loved and desired to marry, and also read the long-cherished secret of Hubert Alton's heart.

Halburton Lancaster had known a blighting sorrow during his early life, and he had become conscious later, that he had helped to bring his trouble upon himself, by his own rashness; but he had never yet been wilfully guilty of a deed of meanness the memory of which had the power to bring a blush of shame to his cheek.

He was accounted by all who had ever dealt with him in a business way, "a square man," and one who would never stoop to a dishonorable deed, while he was known to be generous to a fault whenever a brother man was in need.

But to-day Satan had found a weak point in his armor and had entered into him, tempting him to "sow the wind" only that he might "reap the whirlwind" as a result.

CHAPTER IV.

HALBURTON LANCASTER'S OFFER.

EXACTLY as the handsome clock in Halburton Lancaster's office was striking four, Hubert Alton tapped upon the door for admittance.

"Come in," said the lawyer, looking up from a letter he was writing, his fine face hardening and paling a trifle.

The young man turned the handle and entered.

"Aha! Alton, you are indeed prompt," observed Mr. Lancaster, with a nod of approval, "that is a commendable characteristic. Have a chair," he added, indicating one directly opposite him, where he could study every changing expression of the young man's face.

"Thank you," said Hubert, as he availed himself of the invitation.

"Let me see," observed his companion, in a reflective tone. "I believe you graduated from the high school at the same time with Rob, did you not?"

"Yes, sir; we were classmates for four years, though Rob 'took the bun' at the close, and I came out at the 'little end of the horn,'" Alton returned, trying to speak lightly, but with an envious gleam in his eyes, which did not escape his watchful companion.

"Perhaps you underrate your ranking," he said. "I remember meeting you at the reception that followed the commencement—I recall it particularly because you pointed Miss Seymour out to me that evening, if you recollect. It seems a singular coincidence that I have never seen either of you since until to-day, and

then should have found you together. She's a rather attractive young lady, don't you think, eh?" he concluded, significantly.

Alton flushed and shot a perplexed glance at the gentleman.

It struck him as a trifle singular that he should introduce Helen Seymour's name in a conversation which he had expected would pertain wholly to business.

"I suppose you heard what I said when I picked her up after her fall and thought she was dead?" he said, with evident embarrassment.

"Yes, I am compelled to admit that you rather gave yourself away, my young friend," was the smiling reply; "but no harm was done, and, surely, Miss Seymour seems a young lady whom I should think you might feel proud to honor with your affection."

"Indeed I would," returned Hubert eagerly. Then he added, with a shrewd glance at his companion, "I wonder if you know that Rob used to be very fond of her, too—would you feel proud to have him honor her with his affection?"

It was rather a presumptuous question to ask, but the young man could not quite comprehend the situation.

He had come there, as he supposed, upon a strictly business interview, and now Helen Seymour's name was being discussed in a way that perplexed him, to say the least.

"Ahem!" began Mr. Lancaster cautiously, "was Rob fond of her? Well, that was several years ago, and—I think you told me that Miss Seymour's mother was a dressmaker by trade. I should, of course, prefer Rob to marry in his own station in life. However, he will not, in all probability, care to marry any one for some time to come, for we are on the point of leaving for a year's sojourn abroad; consequently, you will

have a clear field, if you care to try to win Miss Helen, without any fear of his poaching upon your preserves." And the gentleman gave his visitor a sly wink and smile as he said this.

"Now, about business," he continued, and, abruptly changing the subject, "what can you do best? What is your forte?"

"I told you this morning that I have been my uncle's confidential clerk for two years, and I believe he regarded me as a fair accountant," the young man replied.

Mr. Lancaster opened a book that lay on the table before him, and pushed it toward him.

"Show me what you can do at figures," he said.

Alton took up a pencil, and began to run up the columns, adding aloud as he went.

He spent some ten minutes thus, when the elder man stopped him.

"That will do," he said; "I see you are quick and accurate. My head clerk needs another assistant during my absence, and I will give you the position, on trial—subject to his approval—for a month. Your salary will be twenty dollars a week. If you prove yourself efficient, this shall be increased to twenty-five at the end of three months. Do you think you would like the situation?"

Hubert Alton regarded the man with astonishment. To him, in his almost destitute condition, the offer seemed like a perfect bonanza.

"Mr. Lancaster!" he exclaimed; "of course I should like it, and be very grateful for it, too. But I cannot understand why you should be so exceedingly kind to me, for I am a comparative stranger to you; you have known absolutely nothing of my character or career since I was a boy at school."

"Well," thoughtfully returned Mr. Lancaster, as he busied himself sharpening a pencil, "it has been

my custom and my pleasure for many years to lend a hand to young men who are willing to work, and who try to help themselves. I happen to need another clerk just now; you are in need of a position; if you prove yourself to be the man I want—and I think you will—you can have the place as long as you fill it acceptably."

Alton sat pale and still, without making any reply, for some minutes.

He was both puzzled and repelled, for there seemed something underneath this unexpected good fortune which was beyond his comprehension.

He had always regarded Mr. Lancaster as one of the most exemplary of men—an aristocrat in the highest sense of the word, and too high-minded to be concerned in anything that savored of intrigue.

But he was now vaguely conscious of a suspicion of some scheme which lay beneath his generous offer that had made his heart bound with renewed courage and hope.

However, he was in no mood to quarrel with his good fortune. He would take the good the gods proffered him, do the best he could for his employer, and await further developments.

"I owe you many thanks," he said, at last, "and I accept your kind offer, promising to serve you to the best of my ability. When may I come to you?"

"To-morrow morning, if you please. I should like to see you well initiated before I leave, and there is now less than a week before we sail," Lancaster replied.

"Very well. I shall be only too glad to get at work again," said Alton brusquely. "At what hour shall I show up, please?"

"At nine. I do not get down-town before that, and I will introduce you personally to Mr. Rice, the manager."

He arose, as he spoke, cordially shook hands with the young man, who left the office immediately, and sought his humble lodging, with a light and happy heart.

He was as prompt the following morning as he had been the previous day.

Mr. Lancaster was on hand to receive him, and immediately presented him to the head clerk as the new assistant, and, this ceremony being concluded, he was set at once to work in his new sphere.

Alton was not a brilliant young man, but he was a good accountant—that was the one thing that he could do really well, and, having recently met with reverses which had reduced him to the verge of abject poverty, he was only too eager to do faithful work in his new position.

He was quiet and unobtrusive, while his close attention to business pleased both the head clerk and his employer, the latter having watched him narrowly during the few days previous to the date of his sailing.

On the afternoon before that even, Mr. Lancaster sought a few moments' private conversation with him, ostensibly to give him some points regarding his work, but really with a far more important—to him—object in view.

"I am sure you will find Mr. Rice very considerate and friendly, and will get along nicely with him, if you continue to do as well as you have begun," the gentleman remarked in conclusion. "I shall not see you again for a year, at least," he added, as he extended his hand, with a smile, "but I wish you all success—in love, as well as in business." His tone held a peculiar significance as he uttered these words.

"Thank you," replied Alton, flushing, and with a great heart-bound; "there is very little prospect of the first part of your wish being fulfilled, but I shall endeavor to attend faithfully to business."

"'Faint heart never won fair lady,' you know, Alton," jocosely returned the elder gentleman, "and I shall hope to hear that you have won the fair Helen ere many months have flown."

Hubert Alton started violently, and shot a swift look of inquiry into his companion's face.

"Yes, I mean it," said Mr. Lancaster, in response to the look, and emphasizing his words with a confidential nod. "Alton," bending nearer, and speaking low, "I will settle ten thousand dollars upon you as a wedding present, if the girl becomes your wife before my return."

Again the young man's heart bounded into his throat, in view of this astounding proposition, while his face expressed the amazement he experienced.

"Mr. Lancaster, you must have some special reason for desiring me to marry Miss Seymour!" he said, with paling lips, and trembling visibly, for the man's proposition had nearly taken away his breath, and made him reel with dizziness.

"Well, having discovered your attachment for her, and wishing always to see young people happy, I thought it might be doing you a kindness to help the match along," returned Mr. Lancaster with a laugh that was by no means natural. "Besides," he resumed, more gravely, "having come so near doing the young lady a serious injury the other day, it would be a kind of—salve to my conscience to give her a comfortable send-off in life."

Hubert Alton stood, with bowed head, for several moments, while his thoughts worked rapidly.

At length, lifting his glance, he looked his employer straight in the eye.

"I am sure I understand you at last, sir," he said, "and I promise you that I will make the most of your—and Rob's absence. I will improve my opportunity

to the utmost, for I shall now have a double incentive to work for."

"All right, Alton—on the day of your marriage with Miss Seymour, you shall have the sum I have named," said Mr. Lancaster, but with averted gaze, and lips that were colorless.

He then shook hands in farewell with Hubert, and turned abruptly from him.

But the wealthy aristocrat went out from his place of business that day with a sense of humiliation such as he had never experienced before, for he was conscious that pride and self-will had led him to do a dishonorable deed—not only in yielding to a terrible temptation himself, but also in placing a temptation in the way of a brother man.

He was conscious of a loss of self-respect, and also of the respect of Hubert Alton, for he realized that the young man had fathomed his scheme, and knew why he wished him to marry Helen Seymour.

It was the first time in his life that he had bribed a man—tempting him, perhaps, to use underhand, even criminal, means to secure the hand of a pure and beautiful girl, and, mayhap, ruin her life.

Who could tell where the wrong would end? He was almost distracted, and wholly wretched, long before he reached his beautiful home, where Rob, all unsuspecting of the plot against him, was awaiting him.

In vain he tried to quiet the voice within him by repeating Cain's query, "Am I my brother's keeper"? But it was weeks before he could throw off the uncanny feeling which resulted from the temptation to which he had yielded, or surrender himself to the pleasures to which he had long looked forward.

The —— sailed on the following day, at noon, and while Rob stood in the stern of the magnificent vessel, as she moved majestically down the harbor,

a great lump in his throat, and unshed tears in his eyes, as he gazed yearningly back toward the city that contained the dearest object of his life. Helen Seymour was weeping her heart out at home, in the privacy of her pretty chamber, and wondering how she could live a whole year without once seeing her handsome and manly lover.

They had taken leave of each other three hours previous, Rob having stolen the time for one last word and handclasp, and to take a costly little locket, containing a fine miniature of himself, painted on ivory, as a parting gift to his dear one.

Helen had borne the farewell bravely, even smiling fondly and cheerfully upon him, when her heart seemed breaking, lest she should sadden him, and make the leave-taking harder for him.

Then, the door had scarcely closed upon Rob, when a couple of her school friends called, and prolonged their visit for more than an hour, and she had no opportunity to indulge her pent-up grief.

But, when they finally left, and the clock, pointing to a quarter past twelve, told her that the great steamer that was to bear her lover across the ocean had slipped her moorings, she could contain herself no longer, and, rushing to her chamber, she fastened out all intruders, threw herself upon her dainty white bed, and made up for lost time in a wild burst of sorrow, and a sense of desolation such as she had never known before.

But hope beats high in youthful hearts, and later that same afternoon found Helen looking brighter and more beautiful for the storm that had swept over her, seated before her easel, working upon a picture, which she was anxious to finish before she left for the Adirondacks, while at the same time she wove delightful plans for the future, when Rob should return from his wanderings, for then, as he had

whispered while he held her clasped close in his arms, she would have finished her course at the art school, and they would begin an ideal life together in a charming little home of their own.

By dinner-time, she was almost her own bright, sweet self again, and chatted cheerily with her mother upon the itinerary which Rob had left with her, so that she might know, each day, just where he was going to be.

After dinner, she read aloud to Mrs. Seymour an article from a popular magazine, and was just on the point of beginning another, when the door-bell rang, and presently the servant brought her a card, which bore the name of Hubert Alton.

CHAPTER V.

AN OLD SCHOOL FRIEND.

HELEN sighed as she reluctantly laid down her book, arose, and went into the reception-room to receive her guest, although she secretly wished him almost anywhere else in the world on that particular evening.

But he greeted her with such evident pleasure, and made himself so agreeable and entertaining, that she soon forgot her momentary irritation at being disturbed, and joined heartily with him in discussing old-time school experiences.

"I owe you an apology, Miss Seymour, for not calling before, to inquire if you sustained any bad effects from your accident early in the week," he began, when their greetings were over, and with his most affable smile, "but the duties of a new position have kept me very closely confined. However, your appearance to-night warrants one in assuming that you are in perfect health."

"You are right, Mr. Alton; I was not hurt at all," Helen responded, with a bright little laugh and flush, as she recalled the incident. "It was only the shock of the fall and the fright that made me momentarily unconscious, and, as you know, I recovered almost immediately. But how did you happen to appear upon the scene so opportunely?"

She was so frank, and free from embarrassment, except for the slight flush, that Alton, who had been somewhat in doubt upon the subject, felt sure that she could not have overheard his passionate exclaima-

tion while he held her in his arms, after her fall, and this knowledge set him more at ease in her presence.

"Oh, I had a leisure day, and was making the most of it," he replied. "I was sitting upon that rustic seat, reading my morning paper, when you and your friends rounded that turn. I saw instantly that there must be a collision, and so I was on the spot almost as soon as you touched the ground."

"Who was the other gentleman?" Helen inquired, after a moment of silence.

Alton shot a quick glance of surprise at her as she put the question, for it betrayed that she was as ignorant of Mr. Lancaster's identity, and of the relationship that existed between him and Rob, as he had appeared to be of her.

He was quick to grasp the fact that it might be to his advantage not to enlighten her upon the subject, and he replied composedly:

"His name is Lancaster. He is quite a prominent man in New York, and, singularly enough, your accident of Tuesday resulted in great good to me, for, during a conversation that followed your departure, I learned that the gentleman needed a clerk, and he knew that I was seeking a position, which I secured with him on the following day."

"Indeed? What a happy coincidence! And I am very glad for you," Helen heartily rejoined; then added reflectively: "He is a very fine-looking man—in fact, a distinguished-looking man—and I was unaccountably attracted toward him."

Hubert Alton smiled to himself, and wondered if she would not experience a sudden revulsion of feeling if she could know the attitude which Mr. Lancaster maintained toward her.

"Yes, he is a handsome man," he admitted.

"I think that is a term, according to the common acceptance of the word, that will not exactly apply to

him," said Helen thoughtfully; "or, rather," she corrected, "it does not express enough. He is more than handsome—there is more than mere physical beauty in his face; his every feature is fine and clear-cut; there is intelligence, power, and refinement in its ever-changing expression; his form is grand, his bearing the perfection of dignity, while his snow-white hair is a particularly distinguishing feature; it seems to soften his countenance, and to crown him as one superior to other men. I believe he is a man whom one could trust to the last with all that is most sacred in life," she concluded, with an earnestness which betrayed how deeply she had been impressed by his personality during the few moments that she had been in his presence.

Poor Helen! How sadly her ideal would have been marred and defaced had she but suspected how this same man was plotting against all that was most sacred in her own life!

"Yes, I have heard other people express similar sentiments regarding him," Hubert returned with a slight frown. "But——"

"But what?" demanded the fair girl, with a start, and bending an earnest glance of inquiry upon her companion.

"I fear I am not so credulous regarding outward appearances," he observed, with a smile that held something of irony in it. "If one could read beneath the surface, one would often find flaws which would be appalling, and ruthlessly destroy our ideals."

"Oh, Mr. Alton! I was really afraid, from your tone, that you knew something detrimental to the gentleman!" exclaimed Helen, drawing a long breath of relief, in view of his generalization. "But do you judge everybody in that suspicious way? I am afraid you are pessimistic, and have not seen the best side of human nature," she said, with a smile of gentle

reproof, adding: "Now, I have been taught to believe the best of every one—to feel that even those who are outwardly most repulsive have in their inmost nature traits of the Divine which, ultimately, will refine and purify the whole."

The young man shrank instinctively beneath her words, and before the pure gaze which she bent upon him, for they aroused a sense of shame and guilt within him, in view of the ignoble motives which were actuating him in seeking her society, with the determination to win her for his wife, if possible.

It was true that he loved her—had loved her ever since he had first met her at school, and, no doubt, he would have sought to win her even without the added incentive of Mr. Lancaster's promise to settle the ten thousand dollars upon him if he succeeded in marrying her.

He was conscious of having lowered and degraded himself by acceding to the plot with the hope of enriching himself, and, besides, there were other reasons, which will appear later, why the scheme seemed especially obnoxious and perfidious.

Alton was not naturally a bad fellow. As a youth, he had possessed good instincts, his mother having tried faithfully to instil honorable and upright principles in his mind, and a desire to rise in the world in a way to secure the respect and esteem of his fellow-men.

But the greed of gain, combined with the determination to win the woman he loved, at any risk, had already left its blight upon him, and he was conscious of the fact.

"That is a beautiful creed, Miss Seymour," he gravely observed in reply to her little sermon on charity, but with perceptible loss of color; "and, I am sure, the world would soon be metamorphosed if every one would adopt and live it. But," with a smile,

"doesn't the good Book tell us that 'man is prone to do evil as the sparks are to fly upward'?"

Helen laughed out merrily.

"No, indeed, it doesn't! And you will have to study it more carefully if you hope to establish your arguments by the use of its precepts," she roguishly returned. "But this is not the first time, by any means, that I have heard that passage misquoted," she added, as she noted his flush of embarrassment. "Job says: 'Man is born to trouble as the parks are to fly upward.' How sad it would be if your quotation were true! Why, there would be no good; there would be only evil in the world. But my mother has taught me, and I believe, that man has, seemingly, a dual nature—one which looks, lives, and aspires Godward, or goodward, and another which appears inclined to do evil. Did you ever think of it—that word evil reversed spells live? And it is strangely suggestive, teaching that, when we reverse that which is wrong in our human nature, annihilating it with good motives, good thoughts and deeds, we begin to live our divine nature, and so, really, make the world better. But pray excuse me for preaching metaphysics to you," she interposed, as she noted his grave face and averted eyes, "and let us change the subject. Where do you expect to spend your vacation this year, Mr. Alton?"

"I have already had a long and enforced vacation, Miss Seymour," Hubert explained. "My uncle, for whom I have been working during the last two years, failed recently, and I could find nothing to do until Mr. Lancaster offered me, last Tuesday, a position in his office; consequently, having been there so short a time, I shall not feel justified to ask for any vacation this summer."

"And so you will have to remain in this hot city

throughout the season?" said Helen inquiringly, and with a note of sympathy in her tone.

"Yes. And, really, I am only too glad to be at work again," said the young man, with an earnestness that bespoke his sincerity. Then he inquired: "Where do you and Mrs. Seymour go for your outing?"

"We have a small cottage on the outskirts of a little village in the Adirondacks. We have been there for several years, and, as several of my old school friends spend their summers in the same place, we have just the jolliest, nicest times imaginable," Helen returned.

"When do you go, and how long do you remain?" her companion inquired.

"We leave on Wednesday of next week, and we shall be absent about six weeks."

Hubert Alton experienced a shock of dismay at this information.

Six weeks seemed a long time to wait before beginning to pay court to her, and lay siege to her heart; but there was no help for it, and he knew that he must quietly submit to the inevitable.

But there was one opportunity to gain a foothold before their departure, and he devoutly hoped that fortune would favor him in turning his advantage.

"Do you remember the Benyons, Miss Seymour?" he inquired, with an eager note in his voice.

"Yes, indeed," Helen responded, with animation. "Neil Benyon was in your class, and what a fine, bright fellow he was! Hattie graduated a class in advance of me, but we were great friends during her last year. The entire family went to Europe that same fall, and I have not known anything of their movements during their absence."

"Ah, but they returned about three weeks ago, and I have seen Neil several times," Hubert informed her.

"How glad I am that you told me! I shall call upon them before I leave," said Helen.

"They also will leave New York next week. They go to Newport for the remainder of the season," pursued the young man, adding: "Perhaps you remember that Neil and I were inseparable cronies during our school days, in spite of the difference in our positions socially?"

"Yes, I remember," Helen assented.

"Well, I have an invitation from him," taking an envelope from his coat pocket, "asking me to join a yachting party for a run out to sea to-morrow. Doubtless you know that Mr. Benyon owns a fine steam-yacht. They will leave about nine-thirty in the morning, and return in the evening, by moonlight. The moon will be full, and it will be an ideal trip. I am instructed to bring one or more friends with me—'the more, the merrier', the note reads—and part of my errand here this evening was to ask if you and Mrs. Seymour will accompany me—that is, if you do not object to a trip of that kind on Sunday."

"No," Helen thoughtfully returned, and replying to the latter clause first. "Of course, the Benyons would have only ladies and gentlemen with them. Our church is closed, and mamma and I often make a trip to the park, or into the country, with our books and lunch, on Sunday, and feel there is no wrong done."

"And will you go to-morrow?" eagerly inquired Alton.

"I—will ask mamma," said Helen evasively, for she was somewhat in doubt about accepting an invitation of that nature. She arose, to seek her mother, when just at that moment the bell rang again, and a moment later the servant brought her a note, and informed her that the messenger would wait for an answer.

Excusing herself, Helen hastily broke the seal, and read the missive.

"How very strange!" she exclaimed, glancing brightly up at her companion as she finished. "Here is a note from Hattie Benyon herself, extending the same invitation to us, and apologizing for being so late about it, as she had only at the last moment succeeded in obtaining our address, we having changed our location during her absence in Europe. I will take the note to mamma, and consult with her, if you do not mind being left by yourself for a few moments."

"Certainly not," said Hubert, and the girl eagerly left the room.

Mrs. Seymour could not well refuse so cordial an invitation, even though it had come so late, and she felt, too, that it would be a delightful change, to get away from the hot, dusty city, out upon the open sea, if only for a few hours.

She told Helen that she would reply to the note for her, and she could go back to her visitor.

Afterward, she joined the young people, and spent half-an-hour with them in pleasant converse. Then Hubert took his leave, after promising to come on the morrow at eight-thirty, to escort them to the pier from which the Benyon yacht would sail.

He was promptly on hand, and the trio, on arriving at the pier, found a happy and congenial company awaiting them.

They were warmly greeted by the Benyons, who introduced them to those who were strangers to them, and fifteen minutes later the pretty, white-winged craft, "The Jonquil," was riding over the blue waves with all the speed and grace of a bird in its native element.

It was a fine company that the Benyons had invited to partake of their hospitality for the day—a cultured, high-toned party, who, while they could not fail to enjoy to the utmost the outing, the exhilarating breezes of old ocean, the perfect weather, the elegant

appointments of the beautiful vessel, and the charming companionship of each other, never once forgot it was the Sabbath, and preserved throughout a proper and decorous regard for it.

It was, indeed, an ideal trip.

A fine lunch was served on deck at noon, and an elaborate dinner in the saloon at six, and, after the latter meal, the skipper, according to the previously arranged program, changed his course to make the return trip.

The voyagers gathered in groups upon the deck, and quietly watched the gorgeous sunset as the orb of day gradually sank out of sight in masses of golden, rose, purple, and gray clouds, which eventually turned to a threatening black, and, mounting upward with indescribable and threatening fleetness, warned the company that a storm would soon overtake them.

On and on it came, until the whole sky was overcast, and darkness settled over the face of the deep.

Vivid flashes of lightning were followed by terrific claps of thunder, and sweeping sheets of rain finally drove every one below, and several into their state-rooms, in a helpless condition.

Considerable alarm was manifested by the company, but they were assured that the skipper and crew were sailors tried and true, and thoroughly knew their business; that the yacht was a strong, well-built craft, and had weathered many a storm even more severe than the one they had now encountered.

These proved to be no idle boasts, for under the hands of her skilful master the staunch little vessel rode the angry billows like a bird at rest, and kept straight on her course.

The storm finally spent itself, the rain ceased, the wind subsided, and, though the clouds were still heavy and the waves ran high, those of the voyagers who were able gathered courage to return to the deck

for the sake of air, and because the motion of the vessel was less perceptible above than below.

They finally entered the harbor, where the water was much more calm, and, feeling that they were now out of danger, all hearts became lighter.

It was still dark, however, although the clouds were beginning to break, and little rifts of light shone through, showing that the friendly moon was behind, and would soon reveal her shining face, and their progress was necessarily slow because of other craft which were all about them.

All at once, without sign or warning, and in spite of the precautions of the faithful skipper, there came a terrible crash and jar; the jaunty yacht suddenly careened over upon her side, there was a heartrending shriek, which struck terror to the soul of every one who heard it, something white was seen to go over the railing and disappear; then there came a fierce, hoarse order to reverse the engines, and make ready a life-boat, for a woman had been swept overboard!

CHAPTER VI.

A YACHTING PARTY.

HUBERT ALTON, having constituted himself the escort of Mrs. and Miss Seymour for the outing, had, of course, remained with them mostly throughout the day.

He had anticipated their every wish, and assiduously looked after their comfort and lightest need.

He was a good-looking, gentlemanly, appearing fellow, with a vein of quiet humor, and being well read and a good talker, he contributed not a little toward the entertainment of the party, even Mr. and Mrs. Benyon pronouncing their son's friend quite an acquisition.

But, over and above his desire to please in a general way, Hubert Alton had but one object in view—that of establishing a foothold in the confidence and regard of Mrs. Seymour and her lovely daughter, with the hope of ultimately winning the latter.

After the storm abated, and the rain had ceased to fall, several of the party, mostly young people, disliking the closeness and confinement of the saloon, returned to the deck, as has already been stated.

Hubert and Helen were among them, and, after pacing the planks for awhile, took their stand at one side of the yacht, to watch the harbor lights, as well as those of the city, which they were approaching, while they fell into a friendly conversation upon various topics, their school experiences predominating.

That terrible crash when the unseen vessel had

struck "The Jonquil" had come upon the opposite side from where they were standing, and the force of the collision, together with the violent careening of the boat, threw Helen off her feet, and over the railing, before Hubert could put out a hand to save her, while her shriek of despair, as she sank into the black depths below, was like a dagger plunged into his heart.

It was a horrible moment, a moment during which every drop of blood seemed to freeze in his veins, and every nerve and muscle of his body to become paralyzed with fear. The next, reasoning that Helen would be left in the wake of the vessel, he sprang toward the stern, tearing off his coat and vest as he went, then leaped over after the girl, without pausing to consider how desperate was the deed he contemplated.

Down, down he went beneath the murky waves, and to his impatient heart it seemed as if he would never begin to rise.

When he finally arose, and gratefully drew the fresh, pure air into his lungs, his heart bounded with sudden joy and hope to find that the heavy clouds had parted, and the moon had come forth, flooding the whole harbor with its silvery light, while just beyond him he caught a glimpse of Helen's white skirts as, for the second time, she arose to the surface.

With an eager cry, the young man put forth all his energy, and, being a good swimmer, he struck out boldly toward her, and managed to get a grip upon her clothing, and drew her unconscious form within the embrace of one arm, while he vigorously trod water, and shouted for help.

He was seen and heard by the sailors upon the yacht, who, under the brief, authoritative orders of the skipper, were already lowering a boat to go to

the unfortunate girl's rescue, while they shouted encouragement to her brave deliverer.

In less time than it takes to relate it, they were speeding toward the young hero and his fortunately helpless burden, whose head and his own were just able to keep out of water. It is doubtful if either of them could have been saved if Helen had been conscious, for, like all drowning persons, she would probably have struggled frantically, and so jeopardized both their lives.

The friendly moon still shone brightly, as if to aid the sailors' Herculean efforts. The boat drew near and nearer, until, within arms' length, strong hands were outstretched to grasp the young man and his precious charge, and drew them carefully into the frail craft, then sped swiftly back toward the yacht.

In less than twenty minutes from the moment of the accident, both Helen and her rescuer were landed safely upon the deck of "The Jonquil."

The living, but still senseless, girl was borne directly below to one of the staterooms, where vigorous measures were employed to restore her.

As far as could be ascertained at that time, and in the confusion that prevailed, no great damage had been done to the yacht.

The vessel that had run her down had been very skilfully managed, getting out of the way almost immediately as the yacht careened over after the crash, and then, upon seeing her right herself, had moved on upon its own way.

Hubert, although considerably exhausted from his violent exertions and the intense excitement under which he had labored, was really none the worse for the accident, and, after having been supplied with some dry clothing by the sailors and others of the company, presented himself upon deck with all pos-

sible despatch, where he made anxious inquiries for Helen.

"She has revived," one of the ladies informed him, "but seems very weak from the shock which she has sustained."

Later, the young man went below, to ascertain for himself from Mrs. Seymour her exact condition.

The grateful, but almost unnerved, woman came to streaming eyes.

"Mr. Alton, what can I say? How can I express my gratitude for the heroic deed you have performed?" she brokenly exclaimed, adding, with quivering lips: "I have known trouble in my life such as falls to the lot of few women, but, if I had lost my darling, I should have been utterly crushed. Words fail me in view of the debt I owe you."

"Pray do not make more of the affair than I deserve," said Hubert, with becoming modesty. "I should have been a coward, indeed, if I had left Miss Seymour to perish without making an effort to save her. Only assure me that she will come out of it all right, and I shall be more than repaid for what I have done," he concluded, with visible anxiety.

"Yes, she is doing very well," Mrs. Seymour told him.

"How unfortunate that there is no physician on board," said Hubert regretfully.

"Ah, but we have plenty of kind friends, who seemed to know exactly what to do. I doubt if a physician could have done more for her," replied Mrs. Seymour, smiling through her tears. Then, laying one white hand almost affectionately upon the young man's arm, as she earnestly searched the still pale face, she inquired: "But are you fully recovered from the shock which you also must have sustained?"

"Physically, yes. And, now that I know that Miss Seymour is doing well, I shall soon be wholly my-

self," Hubert replied; then added considerably: "But I will not keep you from her; and, if there is anything I can do for either of you, do not fail to call upon me."

Mrs. Seymour thanked him, and then went back to her dear one in the stateroom.

Three-quarters of an hour later, under the light of a full moon and a clear, star-lit sky, "The Jonquil" rode gently up to her pier, and discharged her precious freight, every heart thrilling with thankfulness, in view of the wonderful escape they had had.

Helen, carefully wrapped in blankets, was borne on deck, where her companions crowded around her, with grave faces and anxious eyes, to ascertain her condition.

The reaction was complete, and their spirits returned almost immediately when she lifted a brave and smiling, though still white, face, and laughingly assured them that, except for her soiled and water-soaked plumage, she was "as good as new."

She continued to make merry with them, as the kind-hearted sailors carried her gently off the boat, claiming, with a pretty assumption of importance, the superiority of her position in having such devoted attendants.

A carriage was obtained, when she was placed within it, and, accompanied by her mother and Hubert, who insisted upon seeing them safely housed at home, she drove away, waving a cheerful good night to her friends upon the wharf.

Alton was a daily visitor in their pretty apartment after that during the little time that they remained in the city. They did not leave on Wednesday, as they had planned to do, but delayed their flitting until Thursday, for Mrs. Seymour felt that Helen needed the rest, and would not be strong enough to attempt the trip before.

Herbert was very attentive during these few days, and made himself so useful in helping them to get away that Mrs. Seymour found herself wishing that she had a strong and manly son like him to lean upon during the remainder of her life.

Both mother and daughter urged him to visit them, if only for a day or two, while they were in the Adirondacks; but this he felt he could not do, because of the time and expense that would be involved in going and returning. They took leave of him with heartfelt expressions of gratitude and regret, and declared that they should expect to see him often upon their return.

The young man naturally found himself both depressed and lonely after their departure, but he finally reasoned that six weeks would soon slip away, and it would be poor judgment to spend the time in moping.

He devoted himself assiduously to business, for he was determined to win the additional salary that had been promised him at the end of three months, if he gave satisfaction.

He took special pains to make himself agreeable to Mr. Rice, the head clerk, frequently offering to assist him by working overtime when he found that he was pressed, thus shrewdly ingratiating himself into his confidence, and learning the ropes of business; for, he told himself, with an eye to the future, in the event of an emergency, he might possibly be able to step up into his position.

Thursday evening found Mrs. Seymour and Helen cozily ensconced in their pretty six-room cottage in the Adirondacks. Mrs. Seymour, as we have learned, was a fashionable dressmaker. She had begun in a very small way, many years ago, and prosperity had attended her until she was now mistress of a fine establishment, and had accumulated quite a little property, besides.

About five years previous to the opening of our story, she had purchased a lot of land, and built a pretty cottage in the Adirondacks, where, every season since, she had spent a number of weeks.

It was an ideal vacation to both mother and daughter. Mrs. Seymour lived but for her child, while, in Helen's estimation, there was no one in the world like her mother. To her she was not only the most beautiful woman that lived, but also the loveliest in character. She thoroughly appreciated the struggles through which she had passed, and the sacrifices which she had made to give her the many advantages which she had enjoyed, and she was never weary of planning for her pleasure, or waiting upon her, and trying to the utmost to make her outing as enjoyable and restful as possible, and thus become well equipped to take up her business again in the fall.

They lived very simply, doing most of their own work, and really enjoying this playing at housekeeping, as they called it; and, after their morning duties were over, they would spend the remaining hours of the day in reading, painting, or doing a little fancy work, or in roaming the woods, for they dearly loved to be out of doors in the fragrant piny forests.

They had pleasant neighbors, with whom they exchanged visits, and among them were several of Helen's school friends; also, some wealthy families from Brooklyn and New York, who entertained generously, so that there was no lack of sociability and amusement.

There were tennis-courts, golf and croquet grounds all about them, and gay parties, for these sports were frequently arranged. Then there were mountain rides, by daylight and by moonlight, and now and then a hop at some of the larger houses.

The Seymours found, upon their arrival this season, that some new dwellings had been erected during

the last year, and that their dear little coterie outside the village had thereby been considerably increased.

One morning, Helen having gone for the day with a fishing party to one of the numerous lakes in the vicinity, Mrs. Seymour, with a basket upon her arm, started forth to gather mosses from the woods. She also took an interesting book along, intending to spend an hour or two in a charming glade, which she often frequented when she wished to be alone.

She was already looking better and brighter for the brief change and rest that she had enjoyed. Her face had lost much of its care-worn expression, a fine color glowed upon her cheeks, her eyes gleamed with a sense of freedom and enjoyment, her lips were red as partridge-berries, her step elastic, and, clad in her trim suit of gray brilliantine, made to clear the ground for just such expeditions as this, she looked almost girlish as she moved, with an easy, graceful gait, along the woodland path.

She was, indeed, a very beautiful woman, in spite of her forty-two years and the sorrows of her past.

Her face was replete with intelligence and refinement, while there was a decisiveness in all her movements which was indicative of unusual self-reliance and strong reserve force.

She seemed to enjoy her freedom and hummed the air of a pretty song which Helen had been practising the previous evening as she sped on her way, her becoming shade hat of shirred white lawn pushed slightly back from her white forehead, upon which curled light rings of glossy, golden hair.

She traversed the shaded path for nearly a mile, then came suddenly out into an opening in the woods, where a couple of rustic seats had been placed for trampers to rest upon. It was a favorite resting-place

and resort for those who lived in that region, and beautiful beyond description.

Mrs. Seymour deposited her basket upon one of the seats, then seated herself beside it, removed her hat, and drew forth her book.

"How perfectly lovely it is here!" she breathed, as her eager eyes roved appreciatively over the sylvan scene, drinking in its enchanting beauty, while she inhaled, with a long breath, the spicy odor of the tall, plummy pines all about her. "It seems almost like a glimpse of paradise, after a whole year of dusty pavements and hot, red brick walls."

She leaned restfully back in her seat, and sat for some time enjoying the solitude, the soft sighing of the breeze in the boughs above her, the songs of birds as they flitted about, with now and then the chatter of a squirrel, as it sprang from limb to limb, and peered curiously down at the stranger below; but gradually her face lost something of its brightness; a sad, wistful expression crept into her dark-blue eyes, and the corners of her sweet mouth settled into curves of pain.

It was as if she had lost herself in some mournful dream of the past.

But she suddenly aroused herself, with an impatient shrug of her shapely shoulders, threw back her proud head, with a determined air, even though a shivering sigh parted her red lips, and, resolutely opening her book, found her place, and began to read.

By degrees, she became absorbed in the story, and read for more than an hour, when the sound of crackling twigs and footsteps behind her distracted her attention.

The next moment a beautiful Gordon setter bounded into the glade before her, and, with a short bark of surprise, paused, with one foot upraised, as if intent upon ascertaining whether she were friend or foe.

Mrs. Seymour had always been very fond of animals, and instantly an electric thrill and current of sympathy seemed to establish between herself and the splendid creature.

"Good dog—come here, sir," she said in a low, gentle, beguiling voice, and with an inviting gesture of her white hand.

The setter went directly to her, laid his handsome head upon her lap, lifted his expressive brown eyes to hers, and wagged his tail in grateful acknowledgment of her friendly greeting.

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Seymour, while she softly patted and stroked his silken head, "I am sure you have a master not very far off."

The tail wagged more vigorously now, the brown eyes seemed fascinated by the fair, beautiful face looking so genially down upon him, and he gave a low, pleased whine, as if in response to her remarks.

Just then other steps attracted Mrs. Seymour's attention, and, glancing over her shoulder, she espied a tall, finely formed man, in hunting-suit and leggings, with a gun swung over his shoulder, a game-pouch at his side, just coming into view.

"Aha, Gipsy, you runaway! So you have found a new friend!" said the gentleman, now stepping out into the open glade, and speaking in a frank, hearty tone, while he removed his hat, with a deferential air, upon realizing that he was in the presence of a lady.

Before the sentence was finished, a startled cry of pain broke from Mrs. Seymour, and she arose to her feet, her face as white as snow, her form becoming suddenly rigid as a statue, a hunted, terror-stricken look in her beautiful eyes.

"You!" she panted, breathlessly, and gasping as if from suffocation.

CHAPTER VII.

FROM OUT HER PAST.

"GREAT Heaven! Margaret—Margaret Wilton!" hoarsely ejaculated the stranger, his own face growing pale as ashes and staggering backward, as if some unseen hand had smitten him a mortal blow.

The sound of his voice, and of that long-unaccustomed name, caused the woman to start violently, and broke the spell that had held her rigid, while she glanced right and left, with a look of terror in her eyes, as if she feared some one might have heard.

"Hush!" she breathed, lifting her hand with a warning gesture. "That name must not be uttered here, and never again in connection with me!"

"Ha! Then you are—have been living incognito all these years!" cried her companion, while his hungry eyes devoured every lineament of her exquisite face.

"Yes—ever since—ah!" her voice faltered, and a spasm of agony contracted her white lips.

"Ever since that fatal day, you mean?" he questioned.

She nodded slightly. She did not seem to have strength to answer him; and, overcome by the rush of painful memories which this unexpected encounter aroused, she swayed dizzily; then, throwing out her hand, grasped the back of the seat from which she had just risen, to keep herself from falling.

The man dashed his gun upon the ground, and started toward her, as if to support her, his fine eyes filled with inexpressible yearning.

But she at once checked him, with a passionate gesture.

"No!" she gasped; "do not come near me—I could not bear it!"

The man clinched both hands spasmodically, and a wave of despair swept over his face, while his strong, white teeth could plainly be heard gritting against each other.

"No, I will not—do not fear," he returned, in a constrained tone, after a moment. "But sit down, Margaret; you are not fit to stand. I could curse the fate that brought me here this morning to cause you even a momentary pang."

She sank back upon the seat, even before he ceased speaking, for her trembling limbs refused to support her another moment, whereupon the setter crept again to her feet, laid his head once more upon her knees, and lifted his eyes wistfully to her face, with a sympathetic whine. He seemed to know intuitively that she was suffering, and it was strangely touching to see how irresistibly he was drawn to her, a perfect stranger, while he ignored his master, who was manifesting not one whit less of anguish.

The gentleman threw himself upon the ground, an involuntary groan bursting from him, clasped his hands about his knees, and dropped his head upon them.

The two sat thus for several moments, not a sound disturbing the silence, except that the dog whined once again, when Mrs. Seymour almost unconsciously lifted her hand and dropped it caressingly upon his head.

At last the man looked up.

"Margaret," he said, "since we have been so unfortunate as to meet, I cannot bear to leave you without learning something of your life. Will you tell me how you have spent the past twenty years?"

A bitter smile flitted across the woman's lips.

"I have spent them as any outcast and wanderer would have done who possessed an atom of self-respect and moral responsibility, struggling to earn my own living and rear my child," she responded in tremulous tones.

"Your child?" cried her companion, with a violent start. "My God! have you a child, Margaret?"

"Yes."

"A son or daughter?"

"A daughter."

"And what do you call her?"

"Helen."

"Helen? For your mother! By what other name are you two known?"

"Seymour. I suppose, now that you have discovered me, I may as well tell you."

"Ah! Then I have heard of you," was the eager response; "you are known here as that lovely Mrs. Seymour and her beautiful daughter; your praises are on the lips of every one, and Helen seems to be a great favorite. I saw her only the day before yesterday, at the Farlow tennis tournament. But she does not resemble you, Margaret."

"No."

"She looks like—like——"

"Yes; you do not need to tell me," and the woman shivered, as if an icy blast had swept over her, and her voice died away in a moan of anguish.

"Curse me! I need not have reminded you of it!" said her companion fiercely; "but I thought there was something strangely familiar about her. She is very lovely, though—a refined type, perhaps, of——" He broke off suddenly, with a bitter laugh, then added: "How strange that I did not even dream you could have such a responsibility added to your other troubles!"

Mrs. Seymour lifted her head, with an air of surprise, while a wave of infinite tenderness swept into her eyes.

"Ah, but my darling has been such a comfort to me! What should I have done without her? Life would not have been worth the living," she murmured, more to herself than in reply to what her companion had said.

"Of course. I can readily understand that," he replied, with a heavy sigh; "but, oh, how hard the struggle must have been for you! What dire results that one rash act has entailed upon you! Margaret, can you ever forgive me?" he concluded, as, with another groan, he dropped his head upon his knees.

Margaret Seymour did not reply.

She seemed lost in thought, and almost oblivious to what he had said, and sat absently stroking the silken ears of the setter, who had not once changed his position, but still sat looking wistfully into her sad, white face, thus mutely expressing his sympathy for and a desire to comfort her.

Again a gloomy silence settled over the two, during which each seemed absorbed in reminiscences of the past, and it was difficult to judge which was most deserving of compassion—the pale, beautiful woman, out of whose face had gone all the brightness and joy of an hour previous, whose drooping attitude, heavy eyes, and trembling form betrayed a desolation beyond the power of words to express; or the strong man, whose stalwart frame was, every now and then, convulsed with the agony of a lifelong grief and unceasing remorse.

At length, without lifting his head, he humbly inquired:

"How have you lived, Margaret? Will you tell me?"

Margaret Seymour shivered at the question, as all

the struggles of her bitter past flitted through her mind. Then her face hardened.

"Well, for the first year and a half after I left home that is, before Helen was born, and while she was too frail to be trusted to an ordinary nurse—I existed upon the proceeds of the few jewels that belonged exclusively to me, and that I felt I had a right to bring away with me. After that money was spent, I began to do dressmaking on a small scale——"

"Dressmaking! You!" interposed the man before her in a voice of dismay.

"Yes, I—Margaret Wilton, the hitherto petted child of fortune; I became a common dressmaker, or, rather, an ordinary seamstress at first," she returned, with a short, metallic laugh, and biting sarcasm that was like a dagger plunged into the heart of her listener. "I, who was once the only darling of adoring parents," she continued bitterly, "who spared nothing for their idol; I, the belle of a brilliant circle for many seasons, the flattered favorite, the fortunate winner of the catch of the year; the bride of less than twelve months, who fondly believed herself to be the apple of her husband's eye, to possess his unbounded confidence and respect, as well as his love; who was surfeited with riches, with jewels, silks, velvets, laces, a palatial home, horses, carriages, and a thousand other things to make life beautiful. It was, indeed, a great come-down, John Wilton. I do not wonder that you are appalled when you contrast the position of a hard-working seamstress, earning her paltry dollar a day, when she was fortunate enough to obtain work, with my former life of ease, luxury, and selfish gratification."

"Don't, Margaret—for God's sake, don't speak so bitterly, so recklessly!" pleaded her listener, reaching out an appealing, trembling hand to her. "Every word you have uttered has been like molten lead

poured upon my bleeding heart! I know that I alone am responsible for all. I have long realized that but for my rashness you would never have gone away—would never have known these bitter experiences. How you must have suffered!”

“Suffered!” she repeated in a hollow tone; “do you imagine that you have any conception of the meaning of that word?” she passionately demanded. “Yes; there were times, during the first three years, when I was actually cold and hungry; but what were cold and hunger compared to the mental torture I endured!”

“Have pity, Margaret! You cannot mean that you were really cold and hungry because you had not sufficient food and fuel?” said the man in a hoarse whisper, as he lifted his haggard face to her.

“I mean just that,” she briefly returned.

“And—the child?”

A fond light leaped into the mother’s eyes at the question.

“Ah, you may be very sure that I did not allow Helen to suffer,” she said; “I had one room, no larger than one of our closets at home, and in it I kept a tiny gas-heater, so that a chill breath could never come near my darling, while I sat and sewed my fingers sore in an adjoining room, through which the wind whistled, like a gleeful fiend, mocking at my poverty and wretchedness——”

“Margaret! Margaret!” groaned John Wilton, as he writhed upon the ground at her feet.

“Well, you wished to know just how I lived,” she said, as she bent a gloomy look upon him. “Helen had the richest of milk, and every other nourishing thing she required, and she grew and thrived in a way to delight my heart, and so it did not matter to me that there were days when only weak tea and rolls passed my lips. But that state of things did not last,”

she continued, with more animation in her tones. "I took pains with every garment that I made; my work was always nicely done; my patrons were well pleased, brought me other customers, and, 'ere long, I had more than I could do. Then I took larger rooms, in a better location, employed a capable assistant, and soon found myself again overrun with orders, and, so, obliged to increase my force still more. This time I ventured out more boldly. I hired a portion of a building in a fashionable locality, fitted up my establishment in a tasteful, even elegant, manner, sent out attractive announcements to swell families, in addition to my old patrons, and almost immediately found myself well established in a very lucrative business. From that time, I have known no hardship, beyond the inevitable cares and responsibilities of such an undertaking, and what my pride would naturally suffer from my changed condition in life. I had long since changed my name, representing myself as a widow, while, having no personal friends in New York, and being so far from my former home, I never came in contact with any one whom I had previously known. I continued to prosper. I charged good prices for my work, and, in every instance, aimed to give an honest equivalent; consequently, money flowed into my hands faster and faster, until I was placed beyond all fear of want, and knew that I could rear and educate my child as carefully and thorough as my fondest wishes dictated. I made a pretty home; I surrounded Helen with all that was refined and elevating. I was careful in choosing her associates. I allowed her to go only to places of amusement that were pure, ennobling, and instructive, and she is to-day a sweet, innocent, lovable, womanly girl—talented, too, for I have given her every possible advantage, and she is a daughter of whom any mother may be justly proud," she concluded, her face having become tenderly lumin-

ous, as, for a moment, she forgot herself and her troubles in eulogizing her child.

"Yes, yes; I realize that all you say of her is true; and you have certainly been a faithful mother; you have done your life work well," her listener observed, as she paused; then he added remorsefully: "But I am appalled when I think of what you have had to meet and conquer during all those years. Can you ever forgive me, Margaret?"

Again she was silent; again her face hardened, and John Wilton's head fell forward upon his knees, a sigh of despair escaping him.

He was a fine-looking man, of perhaps forty-eight or fifty years. He was not what would have been called a handsome man, but he had a strong, intellectual face. A noble expanse of forehead was surmounted by masses of dark, glossy hair, slightly mixed with gray. A pair of keen, expressive black eyes were set deeply beneath smooth, straight brows; his nose was straight and somewhat massive; his mouth was firm, but with melting lines about it, showing a natural tenderness of heart. He was a little above the medium in stature, his frame was well knit, and he carried himself with the freedom and easy grace of the man of the world.

"Margaret, are you still engaged in that—business?" he inquired, after another interval of silence.

"Yes; 'that business' has been my best friend for twenty years," she replied, with a touch of scorn in her tones, as she repeated his words. "I follow it for ten months of the year, and then I come thither for a much-needed rest and change. I confess, it grows monotonous at times, and I am often at my wits' ends, in view of the caprices of some of the people with whom I have to deal; but, for the most part, my customers are well-bred ladies, courteous, considerate,

and kind," but she sighed wearily as she thought how soon she must go back and take up the humdrum burden of her life again.

John Wilton caught the sigh, and sprang suddenly to his feet, his face white and drawn.

"Margaret, listen to me," he began passionately; "do not speak until I have had my say. I have—as I have already intimated—nothing but condemnation for myself regarding the past, and my agency in driving you to the desperate straits and experiences through which you have passed. I shall never forget while I live the anguish of that terrible day when you so suddenly disappeared—your suffering and mine, the passion, the injustice, the misunderstanding that resulted so disastrously. But, my darling—I will say it, in spite of you!" he burst forth fiercely, as she made a repudiating gesture—"my darling, I have never ceased to love you, and I love you now, as faithfully, as wholly, as before there ever came a cloud between us! Let the past all go, Margaret—hear me! oh, hear me! Let it become null and void; come to me—to my heart, and arms, and rest for the remainder of your life, and let me shield you and Helen from every future ill. I am still rich, richer than ever, and, with no one in all the world upon whom to lavish my money. Some, Margaret; come—for your own dear sake, as well as for the sake of your child!"

CHAPTER VIII.

“WE MUST NEVER MEET AGAIN!”

As he concluded, he sprang forward, and knelt beside her upon the ground, although he did not offer to touch even so much as the hem of her dress, while his face was white and quivering with the emotion that so clearly unmanned him, and his broad chest rose and fell with deeply drawn breaths that shook him from head to foot.

He threw out his hands appealingly to her, and they were trembling like a reed shaken in the wind.

Margaret Seymour lifted her eyes to his, and every atom of color went out of her face, even of her lips; but, almost involuntarily, she moved farther away from him.

“John,” she said, after a moment, not unkindly, but relentlessly, “you should not have said this to me; what I told you on that day, twenty years ago, was final—irrevocable. When that terrible crash came, I believed that you had had your lesson, and would realize that the end of all things, as far as you and I were concerned, had come. I have lived my life of exile, thus far, alone—I shall continue so to live until my pilgrimage is over. By my own efforts, as I have already told you, I have overcome the obstacles that were in my path, and I do not need the assistance of any one now to smooth my way. I have every temporal comfort, and a goodly portion in reserve for Helen, in case I should be taken from her. Now, you must leave me, John; you must never speak to me again as you have spoken to-day—you must never seek me; and

—mark what I say!" she interposed authoritatively, "Helen must never learn the history of my past, or of yours."

The man groaned in bitterness of spirit at these stern decrees, as he staggered to his feet, and stood before her, in an attitude of despair.

"Margaret! How relentless you are! How you must hate me!" he said in a voice that was hardly recognizable.

"No, John; I hope that I hate no one. But I cannot alter the facts of the past; that never-to-be-forgotten day placed a barrier between you and me that can never be swept away. You know that I was not responsible for what occurred, that it was all a cruel plot to destroy my happiness and my life; you know that I was a pure, good woman, unjustly condemned, and that, when my vindication was scorned and ignored, my heart was slain, and all affection and hope crushed out of it forever. I do not claim that I was faultless," she went on, with a sigh that was almost a sob. "I was young, impulsive, and liable to make mistakes; but I never committed a wilful wrong, and I was true to my vows, in thought and deed, as the veriest saint could have been. My home was my sanctuary, my holy of holies—my husband my——"

"Margaret! Oh, Margaret, have mercy! I thought I had suffered enough before, but this is the supremest moment of all!" cried John Wilton, as he ground his heels fiercely into the mossy turf, and clenched his strong hands until the nails grew black from the tension.

"Nothing but suffering could result from such an unfortunate experience as ours," the beautiful woman sadly returned; then resumed: "But there is no hate in my heart toward any one—not even toward that false woman, who pretended to be my dearest friend at the same time that she was plotting my ruin. I am

simply sorry for her, for I know that some day she will have to reap what she has sown. I have learned some useful lessons during my long and weary exile, and one is that every wilful evil will eventually rebound upon the perpetrator—that love of God and our neighbor will alone sweeten one's life, and bring the blessing of peace. At first, I was wildly unreconciled to my fate, and passionately revengeful; but one night, when more than usually rebellious, a voice within me suddenly and sharply arraigned me. 'What of your child, Margaret Wilton?' it seemed to say; 'are you going to entail such sinful, murderous thoughts upon that innocent little one? Will you impose upon it the bondage of hate, and discord, and wretchedness? Warp its nature by the influence of your own unrighteous thoughts, thus bringing upon yourself, when it is too late, endless remorse for such incalculable wrong? Or, will you obey the divine precepts of One who, though stricken, smitten, and afflicted, as no other human being has ever been, taught that love alone begets love, and that purity, gentleness, and sweetness are fruits which are never gathered from the thorns and briers of envy, hate, and malice.' I was not conquered in an hour," she said, with a pathetic quiver in her tones. "I battled with my will for many a weary day, but the motherhood within me finally won the victory, and I began, as it were, a new existence, determined that my child should at least respect its mother, and find in her a model worthy to be imitated. So I ceased to hate. I turned my back resolutely upon all vain repining, and strove to cultivate in myself those virtues which I wished to see reflected in my little one. So, you will understand, John, why I no longer cherish a spirit of ill-will or vindictiveness for you, and—if it will be a source of comfort to you—I believe I can also say that I forgive you——"

"Oh, my darling!" the man suddenly burst forth, as he took an eager step toward her.

"But—do not misunderstand me," she interposed, and lifting one delicate hand to arrest him; "we must never meet again!"

John Wilton's head sank upon his breast at her words.

He knew that he had received his final sentence; that there would be no reprieve from that fatal verdict, spoken kindly and gently, but with a resolute intonation that bespoke an unswerving purpose.

A deathly pallor settled over his face, which had also seemed to grow drawn and pinched, from the agony of the past hours, while his eyes were like those of a deer that had been mortally wounded.

"I see that I must bow to the inevitable," he observed, as soon as he could command himself sufficiently to speak. "I suppose I had no right to expect anything else, but it seems hard, Margaret—very hard. However, I am not ungrateful for your assurance that you forgive—that you do not utterly hate and despise me. Now, will you seal that forgiveness by granting me a personal favor?"

Mrs. Seymour lifted an inquiring glance to him.

"That remains to be seen; it depends upon what the nature of the favor is," she cautiously returned.

"It is this—that you will allow me to provide for your future, to settle upon you and Helen a sum that will make you independent, and so relieve you from the necessity of ever toiling another day for your support," the man earnestly entreated.

Margaret Seymour arose from her seat, her face a sheet of scarlet flame at this proposition.

"Accept money from you?" she cried, with quivering lips. "No, never, John Wilton! How dare you propose such a thing!"

He flushed hotly, also, from mingled disappointment and wounded feeling.

"But why, Margaret?" he pleaded; "it seems only right that I should share what I have with you and that dear girl. You are my nearest of kin, and the whole would belong to you, legally, in the event of my demise."

"No—no—no!" she reiterated vehemently, and with a gesture of repulsion.

"But I shall do it, in spite of your protest!" he retorted almost fiercely.

"You shall not!" she returned, straightening her form haughtily, her eyes beginning to blaze with anger.

"You will see," he said, with firm-set lips, but gazing upon her with a look of admiration, for she was regally beautiful in that attitude and mood.

"I will not have so much as a penny from you!" she said in a voice that was terrible in its calmness. "If you presume to do such a thing, I will immediately transfer every dollar to some charitable institution."

"Margaret, you are incorrigible!" cried her companion, in a voice of despair. "You tell me of your struggles, of the poverty you have suffered; you claim that I have ruined your life, and yet you will not allow me to make the slightest restitution."

"There can be no restitution. Do you think that money could effect that?" she questioned, with curling lips. "I will never touch your gold. If I am incorrigible, I am also self-respecting, and will incur no financial obligations—least of all from you!"

John Wilton drew himself up proudly at this harsh rebuff, although his lips quivered from inward pain.

"Forgive me, Margaret," he said quietly, after a moment. "I perceive that I have made another mistake. I will try never to offend you again; but, if you are ever in need of a friend, or of any service, no

matter of what nature, you have but to make it known to me by a single word sent to the old address, and the wings of the wind will not be swifter than I in coming to you. Now, let me assure you that I will never, voluntarily, appear in your presence again. Farewell, and may God bless and guard you and yours while you both live!"

He turned away from her with a look on his face that she never forgot, picked up his gun, and strode away and was soon lost to sight among the trees.

He seemed to have forgotten his dog, but the beautiful creature which had crouched at Margaret's feet when she arose now lifted his mournful eyes up to the fair face above him and whined wistfully, as if asking whether he should go or stay.

The woman bent down and patted him fondly.

"Gipsy, you are a wonderful dog—you seem almost human," she said softly; "but you must go with your master, sir—go!" she concluded, with gentle authority.

The setter licked the hand that caressed him for a moment, then springing to his feet, bounded away in the direction the man had taken.

Margaret Seymour stood looking after him for several moments, such a look of agony on her exquisite face as one seldom sees on a human countenance.

At last she sank back with a low moan upon the seat and bowed her head upon her hands.

"Oh, the burden of life! the mystery of suffering! What does it all mean?—what does it lead to?" she sobbed. "How barren is the world! what a dreary prospect the future! Why are we here? What is the object of it all? How can we escape it, and what is beyond?"

She sat thus for nearly half-an-hour, scarcely moving, apparently absorbed in harrowing memories of the past which the recent interview had seemed to arouse.

At length she sat erect, and the strained, unnatural expression began to fade out of her face.

"Ah, but I know there is a God," she breathed, her beautiful lips tremulous from softened emotions, "and I know that He never turns from those who reach out after Him. I have no business to question—my business is to cleanse and purify my own nature by imitating the divine—I can reach out a helping hand to others who have even less in life than I, and—I have Helen."

A faintly luminous smile wreathed her lips and crept up into her sad eyes as she concluded, and presently rising she gathered up her basket and book and bent her steps homeward.

But the experience of the last hour had told severely upon her, for she walked feebly, falteringly; she looked little like the buoyant, energetic woman who had so recently started forth to spend the day in the woods.

She was some time in reaching the cottage, where she locked herself inside, then sought her chamber, where she threw herself prone upon her bed and lay there for hours, hardly conscious of the lapse of time, but only of her own heartache, and a void in life which she believed could never be filled.

The lunch-hour passed, but she heeded it not; she experienced no physical need; the yearning for that which had once filled her life with beauty, hope, and joy was beyond all other craving.

The pretty marble clock in the parlor striking five at last warned her that Helen would soon return and feel the need of a good, nourishing meal after her long day in the woods and on the lake.

She at once arose, and exchanging her outing-dress for a simple print wrapper, in which, however, she looked not one whit less the lady, set herself about

preparing the evening meal and something which she knew would tempt the appetite of her darling.

Helen came in a little after six, flushed and weary, but bright and happy from the experiences of "just the loveliest time in the world."

She was so full of her good time and so eager to give her mother a detailed account of it, besides being "as hungry as a wolf," she did not at first observe Mrs. Seymour's unusual pallor and unnatural constraint, as she asked innumerable questions for the purpose of distracting attention from herself.

It was only when their meal was ended that Helen became conscious of the fact that her mother was far from being herself.

"Mamma, are you ill?" she questioned, in a startled tone, as she went eagerly to her side, wound her arms about her, and searched her face anxiously.

Mrs. Seymour smiled fondly into the beautiful face bending over her.

"No, dear, I am not ill," she said, with an effort to speak naturally.

"But you are very pale—your eyes are heavy and sunken; why, you look as if you had been sick for a week. I shall find it very hard to forgive you if you have allowed me to go away intent only upon my own pleasures, when you have needed me," Helen concluded reproachfully.

"I assure you I did not need you, dear," her mother replied, "and I am not in the least ill. I went out into the woods this morning, and felt rather exhausted upon my return. But I have been lying down most of the afternoon and am all right now."

"But you are so white," persisted Helen, still studying the dear face earnestly; "you must go out upon the porch and sit quietly there while I clear away and do the dishes."

And she began to gather them up as she spoke.

But Mrs. Seymour insisted upon working with her, and they worked cheerfully together, talking over the events of Helen's holiday with an interest and confidence that only a mother and daughter in full sympathy and harmony could do.

CHAPTER IX.

AN INTERESTING ACQUAINTANCE.

"MAMMA, I made a new acquaintance to-day—one whom I am sure I am going to like very much," Helen observed, when, their work completed, she and her mother went out upon the porch to continue their chat.

"Ah! A gentleman or a lady?" smilingly inquired Mrs. Seymour, but with a swift, alert glance at her child.

"Oh, a lady, of course. I should not dare to declare myself quite so positively interested in a gentleman upon so slight an acquaintance," Helen returned, with a bright little laugh. "She is a niece of Mrs. Sturdyvant, the lady who built that Queen Anne cottage on the hill road this spring—and her name is Marjorie Ellsworth."

"That is rather a pretty sounding name," meditatively remarked the elder lady.

"Isn't it? And she is even prettier than her name," Helen continued eagerly. "She is truly a most captivating little body, with sunny golden hair and blue eyes, which look into yours with the innocence of a little child, and she has an artless manner that appeals to you at once; she is bright and quick-witted, too, and such a talker! She just fascinated everybody and was the life of the party."

"Why, Helen! I seldom knew you to be so enthusiastic over a new acquaintance!" said Mrs. Seymour, with some surprise. "Where is Miss Ellsworth's home?"

"She has been at boarding-school in San Francisco during the last two or three years. Her mother, who is a widow, is abroad, and she is going over in September, with Mrs. Sturdyvant, to join her. They are to spend part of the winter in Germany and a part in France, to enable Marjorie to polish off in the languages," Helen explained.

"Was Mrs. Sturdyvant's maiden name Ellsworth?" queried Mrs. Seymour, musingly. "I once knew a girl of the name of Eliza Ellsworth," she added, with paling lips, "and her brother mar——"

"Why, mamma, I am sure Mrs. Sturdyvant must be the same, for I heard Marjorie speak of her as 'Aunt Eliza,'" Helen interposed. "How queer if she should prove to be an old friend!"

Mrs. Seymour shivered slightly at her last remark.

"I wonder if it can be possible that the girl's mother's name was—Marien Waldbridge?" she muttered, as if speaking to herself.

"Why, dearest!" cried Helen, as she lifted a pair of astonished eyes to her face, "how strangely you said that! As if you actually hated the person bearing that name!"

Mrs. Seymour flushed up suddenly at the implication.

"Did I, dear?" she queried gently, after a moment; then remarked, as once before that day: "I hope I do not 'hate' any one, Helen; but I once knew a Marien Waldbridge who was somewhat uncongenial to me, and who married a man by the name of Ellsworth. However, she may have no connection whatever with your new friend, and," shaking herself slightly, as if to arouse herself from the spell that had fallen upon her, "even if she has, there is no reason why the feeling should extend to Miss Marjorie."

"No, indeed, and I am sure you will be charmed with her when you come to know her," Helen re-

sponded with animation; then added: "I have promised to call upon her to-morrow, and, if you do not object, I would like to ask her to return with me to tea."

"Of course, I could not object, dear; ask whoever you wish to partake of the hospitalities of our home, and whenever you like. I want you to have just as enjoyable a time as possible during our outing," was the cordial reply.

But when Mrs. Seymour was by herself in her own room that night, she sat with bowed head and a pale, perplexed face for more than an hour, musing upon what had occurred that day.

"How strange," she murmured, with a bitter smile, "after twenty years, when I supposed all that to be forever wrapped in oblivion, to be suddenly confronted by him, and then, almost in the same hour, to be brought almost in touch with her. But Helen must never know—she must never suspect the truth, and even though the girl should prove to be Marien Waldbridge's daughter, I must tolerate her and make no sign for that reason; the child is not to blame for her mother's sin."

Helen went to make her call the following day as she had promised, while Miss Marjorie Ellsworth was only too eager to accept her invitation to return and take tea with her.

The moment she saw her, Mrs. Seymour could not but admit that the dainty little fairy seemed to merit all the enthusiastic praise which her daughter had bestowed upon her.

The girl was about Helen's age, but shorter and slighter and of an entirely different style.

She had a perfectly flawless complexion, rather round, childish features, with great innocent blue eyes which had a way of flashing up at one with a look of confidence that at once appealed to the heart, a pair of rosebud lips that were always wreathed

with sweetest smiles, and between which two rows of small exquisite pearls could be seen. Her hair was like waves of sunshine and curled bewitchingly about her white neck and forehead. Her hands and feet were small and beautifully formed, and her voice was peculiarly musical, with a confiding quality ringing through its tones which seemed to imply to every one to whom she spoke that she was thoroughly en rapport with that particular individual.

Add to these attractions all the accessories that wealth could purchase, with good taste and evidences of education and culture, and it is not to be wondered at that this little lady mesmerized everybody with whom she came in contact, making them her sworn slaves from the moment of their meeting.

She came like a sunbeam into the cottage and greeted Mrs. Seymour with her two pretty white hands outstretched and a love-me-please air that was irresistibly charming.

"Helen—she says I may call her that," she began, with a shy blush and apologetic air when the greetings were over, "Helen and I just fell in love with each other yesterday. She is the dearest girl in the world, isn't she? And if you will let me, dear Mrs. Seymour, I want to see a great deal of her this summer—I want to be a great friend with her."

Mrs. Seymour smiled into the lovely upturned face as she clasped the jeweled snowflakes extended to her; then, almost before she was aware of what she was doing, bent down and kissed her on the lips.

A cold chill swept over her the instant after she had done it, and she drew back to study the girl, trying to discover if there were any familiar lineaments in the countenance looking so confidently into hers.

"What if she should prove to be Marien Waldbridge's daughter?" she said to herself; "she may be

as sweet and pure and lovely as she looks, and I have no right to condemn her or show her ill-will because of her mother's sins. She does not look like her, and I will not be suspicious or unjust."

"Yes, Helen is the 'dearest girl in the world'—to me," she said aloud, with a sweet laugh and a fond glance at the maiden in question. "I always give her guests a cordial welcome, and I am sure that you will at least always find her a faithful friend."

She sat chatting with the two girls in her own charming way for fifteen or twenty minutes, then she left them together, realizing that they would have much to talk over regarding the previous day's outing and would chatter with more freedom if she were away.

"The child certainly has a very captivating way with her," she mused, as she passed into her own room and took some sewing from her basket. "Somehow she seems almost too childish and innocent for a girl of her years. I hope it is not a studied innocence."

Then her face darkened as her mind reverted to the past and to the woman who, many years ago, had plotted a great—a cruel wrong against her.

It was very singular, she thought, that two ghosts from out those shadows should have so suddenly arisen to confront her, and just now, when life had become so peaceful and prosperous after her long battle with adversity.

What did they portend? Were they ominous of more sorrow for the future?

Helen and Marjorie, upon being left by themselves, at once dropped into a confidential chat regarding their delightful excursion of yesterday, and their eager voices and merry laughter evinced that their memories of the event were only of the pleasantest nature.

Later Helen showed her friend some of her paint-

ing, for she could not quite give up her work, in spite of the fact that it was vacation time, and Marjorie grew enthusiastic over the exquisite things, and remarked that she was "just dying to learn to paint."

"Do you suppose I could?" she added, lifting a look of earnest appeal to her friend.

"Of course you could," Helen replied, and laughing at her quaint air of innocence; "that is, if you know how to draw. Do you?"

"Yes. I had drawing at school," said Marjorie, with the most modest air imaginable.

"Well, then, there would be no difficulty about your learning to paint, either in water-colors or oils, whichever you might prefer."

"Oh, I think I should just dote on water-colors, if I could do them as beautifully as you do. Say, Helen, dear," she interposed, as if a bright idea had suddenly occurred to her, "why couldn't I take lessons of you while we are here this summer?"

Helen flushed. It had been her intention to teach when she completed her course, but she had not dreamed of finding a pupil so early as this.

"Well," she returned, after thinking the matter over a little, "I really do not feel that I am quite prepared to give instruction yet, but as I usually spend a couple of hours in the morning painting, I will gladly teach you, as far as I am able, if you care to take the trouble to come here from nine to eleven.

"Oh, that would be perfectly delightful!" cried Marjorie, clapping her pretty, jeweled hands rapturously. "I surely will take the trouble—it will be so lovely to work together—and you shall give me regular lessons and I shall pay you two dollars an hour—just what Hattie Hilliard pays her teacher."

"Nonsense, Marjorie!" said Helen, flushing again, "you will do no such thing."

"But you told me that you were fitting yourself to be a teacher," Marjorie gravely responded.

"That is very true; but I am not full-fledged yet."

"Never mind; you've had to pay for what you do know, and I'm not going to steal your knowledge," her companion returned sententiously. "Now, I would like to copy this piece of golden-rod, autumn asters, and cardinal flowers for mamma," she continued, singling out a lovely study. "I should be so proud if I could do it and I'd be glad to pay the two dollars an hour. I'm sure the trouble you'd have with me would be worth it."

"But I should be glad to teach you, just for the pleasure of it. I—really do not like the idea of taking the money from you," persisted Helen.

"Then I shan't come," retorted Marjorie, with a grieved pout and a childish shrug of her pretty shoulders that made her friend laugh out merrily, "and I am so disappointed."

"Oh, you child!" exclaimed Helen amusedly, "do you always manage to get your own way like this?"

"Ah! That means that you will do as I want you to," cried Marjorie, in a gleeful tone, and, leaning forward, she imprinted an impulsive kiss upon her friend's cheek. "Thank you! thank you, dearie! May I begin to-morrow?"

Yes, Helen told her that she might, and though she still felt uncomfortable regarding the question of money, she thought best to say no more about the subject at that time.

They fell to talking of other things, after that, until Marjorie espied a large photograph album upon the lower shelf of a table and pounced eagerly upon it.

"Oh, I'm sure you'll let me—I think it is great fun to look at photos," she said, as she unclasped and opened the cover, revealing the first picture within.

"Do you?" queried Helen, smiling, "I think it is

rather stupid looking at the faces of people in whom you have no interest.

"Why, faces always interest me—I always find stories in them," Marjorie replied, as her eyes fastened themselves upon the likeness of a fine-looking man, whose large, full eyes smiled serenely up at her. "Who is this? Your father?" she added, bending over it with a critical glance.

"No," said Helen, with a soft sigh, "we have no picture of papa, unfortunately; an accident happened to the only one that mamma had when I was a baby, and I have always regretted it so much. That is a photo of Professor Gilbert, who was principal of the high school when I graduated. What kind of a 'story' do you read in this handsome face?" she concluded, with a roguish twinkle in her eyes.

"First and foremost, a consciousness of his own goods looks. See?" and the bright little elf posed in exact imitation of the professor's self-satisfied attitude. "Second, his sense of superiority and domineering disposition. 'I am Professor Gilbert'—pompously—" 'lord of all I survey,' and 'ladies and gentlemen,' " with an important flourish of her little white hand, " 'you will please understand that when I make a rule there will be no reprieve.' "

Helen laughed aloud.

"A professional caricaturist could not have done it better," she said.

"Who are these?" inquired Marjorie, and turning another page.

"Harry and Nell Sedley, classmates."

"Yes, 'Harry' is a nice fellow, kind and conscientious, but bashful and awkward; he'd blush if he imagined a girl was looking at him. But he always had his lessons and rather looked down on everybody else who didn't. 'Nell' is a piece of mischief. She'd eat cake and pickled limes right before the profes-

sor's face and never get found out. She'd snap beans at his bald head, little Miss Innocence, and never be suspected, for of course she was a favorite and no one would peach on her."

"Some more classmates," Marjorie continued, turning over again. "Number one is an arrant flirt and gave half the boys in school the heartache with those roguish eyes and that delightful little pug nose. Number two—prunes, pumpkins, and prisms! She never got a mark, never whispered, or did an improper thing, nor missed a lesson. But, oh, dear! you'd just as soon be in a bed of nettles as near her—she made everybody so uncomfortable."

"Why, Marjorie Ellsworth! however did you learn to read faces like that?" exclaimed Helen, in undisguised astonishment, for the girl had not once missed the mark.

CHAPTER X.

MARJORIE'S AMBITIONS.

"Oh, I told you I could find a story in every one, and there's a lot of fun in it," carelessly returned Marjorie, as she continued to turn the leaves and examine the various pictures in the album.

"But how did you learn to do it—such a child as you are, too?" persisted Helen.

Miss Ellsworth smiled quietly to herself at that supplementary remark.

"Oh, I didn't have to 'learn,'" she said. "I expect it came naturally to me, for my grandfather Ellsworth was a noted physiognomist and wrote a learned book on the subject. Ah! but who is this?" she added, with a start, as she came to the likeness of a fine young fellow.

Helen flushed up suddenly as her eyes fell upon it.

"Another school friend," she quietly observed; "Robert Eggleston by name."

Something in her tone caused Marjorie to shoot a swift glance of inquiry at her, and in an instant she knew the whole story—knew that Robert Eggleston was Helen Seymour's lover, and that the fair girl's whole heart was bound up in him.

But her eyes dropped again as quickly, and Helen never suspected what her telltale face had revealed.

"That's the nicest face I've seen yet," admiringly observed Marjorie, and with a thrill in her tones which testified to her sincerity. "There's lots of fun in you, too, Mr. Robert Eggleston, but you never allow it to

carry you beyond a certain limit. You wouldn't utter a falsehood or do a mean thing to save your life; you'd take off your hat as courteously to a milkmaid as to a princess, and if you once made up your mind to do anything because you knew it was right, you'd do it, or die! Now, who is he? what is he, and where does he live. Tell me all about him, Helen, for—I declare to you, I have fallen in love with him here and now,” she concluded in a mischievous tone, and raising the heavy book in both hands, Miss Marjorie testified to her sudden penchant by boldly pressing her red lips upon the handsome face; then, wonder of wonders! blushed rosily at her audacious act.

Helen laughed out merrily with amusement.

“What a child you are, Marjorie, in spite of the fact that now and then you almost startle one with certain wonderful and unexpected characteristics—like your faculty for reading human nature, for instance,” she said, without a suspicion that the girl's words and act were more than froth upon the surface, like most of her innocent chatter, and so not a spark of jealousy was aroused in her gentle heart. “Robert Eggleston is, as I told you, a school friend. He was a senior when I was a freshwoman. He has a nice face,” with a tender glance at the likeness, “and—and you have read his character very accurately. He is an orphan who has been reared and educated by an uncle. His home has been in New York during most of his life, but just now he is abroad with this same uncle.”

“Oh! Is he that young Eggleston of whom Blanche Helmuth was speaking yesterday, and who sailed a couple of weeks ago?” queried Marjorie eagerly.

“Yes.”

“Will he remain abroad long?”

“For a year, I believe,” said Helen, repressing a yearning sigh.

"Who is his uncle? What is his name?"

Helen started slightly at the question, and for the first time during all her acquaintance with Rob it occurred to her that it was singular, to say the least, that she had never heard him call his guardian by name.

"I have always supposed it to be Eggleston, the same as Rob's. I have never heard him speak of him except as 'my uncle,' or 'Uncle Hal.'"

Marjorie thought that matters could not have gone very far between them, if she was as ignorant as this regarding the handsome young man's relatives, in spite of her familiar "Rob."

"Have they gone to Europe on business or pleasure?" she inquired, with a thrill of intense interest.

"Well, I believe the trip is to be partly for pleasure and partly an educational tour for Rob," Helen returned, adding: "His uncle wished him to see something of the world before settling down to business. You will find mamma's picture on the next page," she interposed, and desirous of changing the subject, for she felt delicate about talking of Rob's affairs to a stranger. "Tell me what you read in her face."

"Patience, perseverance, indomitable courage, and _____"

"And what?" breathed Helen, wondering more and more at the girl's keen perceptive faculties.

"Sweetness, born of some great sorrow," said Marjorie softly, as she threw one arm around Helen's neck and kissed her, as if asking pardon for having looked upon a page of her mother's heart which she would not like her to read.

"How could you tell that?" questioned Helen gravely.

"Look at her eyes, dearie, and that pathetic droop at the corners of her lovely mouth. Did you ever see such an expression on the face of any one who has

not patiently suffered? But come," she added, as she closed the book and put it back in its place, for the tremulousness of Helen's lips had not escaped her, "let us go out of doors for awhile, I want to explore the surroundings of this pretty nest in the woods. Are you not afraid to live here all alone by yourselves?"

"No, indeed," replied Helen, as arm-in-arm they left the house. "We have never thought of being afraid, and we are not so 'alone' as you imagine. You will see Judge Kendal's place on the right through the trees, and his man sleeps in that little outhouse behind the hedge, and so near that we could easily call him if we needed anything, while the Ashleys live over there in the fork of the road."

"Ugh!" said Marjorie, shrugging her shoulders suggestively. "I should have the horrors at night, and I am sure I should die of ennui to be so isolated by day."

Helen laughed out musically.

"I am never lonely—I never feel isolated when I am with mamma; we have the nicest times imaginable together, and we love the quiet after a whole year of roar and rush in the city."

Marjorie shot a queer look at her companion out of the corners of her observing eyes.

"But you like society, do you not? I am sure you were one of the merriest of the company yesterday," she remarked.

"Oh, yes, I like a good time with young people as well as anybody; but there is no one, in my opinion, like one's own mother for solid comfort and enjoyable companionship, especially when one is inclined to give expression to one's inmost thoughts," Helen replied, with an earnestness which bespoke her honesty.

The slightest possible sneer curled the lips of Marjorie Ellsworth as she listened, but it was gone as quickly as it came; then, slipping her arm fondly

around the waist of her new friend, she lifted a pair of wistful, regretful eyes to her.

"What a model daughter you must be to be in such perfect harmony with your mother," she said, with a yearning sigh. "Why," with an ingenuous but rather bitter laugh, "I am never at ease one moment when I am with mamma, for it is 'Marjorie, you musn't do this! Why will you do that? You will never be a lady if you don't pay more attention to the rules of etiquette, and you mortify and annoy me continually,' from morning till night. Of course the fault is all in me," she went on naively. "I suppose I was born incorrigible and can't help it, though Aunt Eliza and I always manage to get along better together."

Helen thought that if she was incorrigible she was very sweetly so, and she did not half believe that she was as inharmonious as she tried to make it appear.

They wandered about for awhile, then returned to the porch and sat in the hammock, exchanging school-girl anecdotes and experiences until Mrs. Seymour called them in to tea.

And such a repast! Marjorie went into ecstasies in her pretty way over it.

Such delicious bread and butter, and strawberries as large as English walnuts blushing through the heaviest of cream! Custards like velvet and real pound cake that just melted in one's mouth, and the iced tea, Russian style, was "like nectar."

Mrs. Seymour had decorated the table with mountain ferns, and it was a picture to tempt either an artist or an epicure.

It was a merry meal, for Mrs. Seymour possessed the rare faculty of forgetting herself and becoming a girl with girls, which was one of her chief charms in the estimation of Helen and her friends.

They had some music afterward, for all three were

musical. Helen and her mother sang duets very sweetly together, and Marjorie made their little upright piano ring out its best under her skilful fingers.

When their guest finally said she must go, mother and daughter walked through the gloaming with her to Mrs. Sturdyvant's gate, where she kissed them both, saying she had had a lovely time, and promising to come for her first lesson in painting on the morrow at nine.

Early the next morning Helen received her first letter from Rob. It had been mailed from Liverpool immediately upon that young gentleman's arrival there, and contained a daily account of what had occurred during the voyage, besides many delightful incidents in connection with the various acquaintances which he had made; but, best of all, many tender passages and messages which spoke direct from his heart to hers.

It was a delicious feast to the fair girl who had been impatiently awaiting its coming, and her face was radiant with happiness when, just as she had finished a second perusal of it, Marjorie put in her appearance for her first lesson.

Nothing was ever allowed to escape that young lady's observant eyes, and she instantly surmised the nature of the bulky epistle which Helen quietly slipped beneath a portfolio of drawings and sketches that lay upon the table.

Marjorie came in with a breezy greeting for both mother and daughter, that was like a burst of sunshine, while she was all enthusiasm in view of beginning work.

She proved herself a very deft and intelligent pupil, and Helen told her that it was going to be only a pleasure to teach her, while she was so bright and entertaining that Mrs. Seymour, who was in and out of the room upon several occasions, felt that she

would be a charming addition to their home, and a very congenial companion for Helen during their stay in the mountains.

They had been seated about an hour at their work when Marjorie asked for a glass of water, saying she was very thirsty, and Helen left the room to get it for her.

The moment she was out of sight little Miss Ellsworth threw down pencil and brush, tip-toed softly to the table, and, lifting the portfolio previously referred to, found the letter which she had seen her friend tuck out of sight just as she entered.

"Aha! I thought so," she muttered, as she observed the superscription, written in a bold, handsome hand, and the Liverpool postmark. "So she is in correspondence with our fine-looking Mr. Robert Eggleston," she went on, a flush of excitement tingeing her cheeks; "I'd give a good round sum if I could see the inside of this voluminous missive."

But a step in the distance warned her of the approach of some one, and, hastily replacing both letter and portfolio just as she had found them, she slipped back to her seat, and was apparently absorbed in coloring a stalk of golden-rod when Helen entered the room bearing a glass of icewater for her friend.

"Thank you, dearie," said Marjorie appreciatively, as she daintily sipped the refreshing draft, "but you must tell me where to go and let me wait upon myself next time. I don't want to be a trouble to you."

Helen protested that it was no trouble—that she liked to break the monotony by getting up occasionally.

At eleven o'clock Marjorie promptly took her departure, and both Mrs. Seymour and Helen felt as if a sunbeam had suddenly gone out of the house, while they were loud in their praise of what she had accomplished during her first lesson, which was cer-

tainly very creditable for a novice. Both were so guileless that they had not a suspicion that the pretty siren was not as artless as she seemed.

They did not dream that those great, innocent blue eyes were ever on the alert to ferret out the secrets of others, or that beneath those sweetly smiling lips and that quaint, childish manner and prattle there lurked a serpent of craft and deceit that was destined some day to strike its poisonous fangs deep into their trusting hearts.

Less than a week ago Marjorie Ellsworth had come to remain with her aunt, Mrs. Sturdyvant, a widow of some wealth, until her departure for Europe, and she had heard Helen Seymour's praises sounded even before she met her upon the excursion two days previous, and, always jealous of honors paid to another, she had at once become anxious to meet this paragon par excellence and judge for herself if she were a "foeman worthy of her steel."

She had herself sought an introduction, and took especial pains to ingratiate herself into the fair girl's confidence, because she saw, at the outset, that she was a favorite with every one, and if she would be popular herself, she must pay court to her with others.

Her curiosity had also been aroused when some one—Blanche Helmuth—mentioned the fact that an old school friend, Rob Eggleston, had recently gone abroad, and she had observed Helen's blush and the tender light that had leaped into her eyes at the name of her lover, and she knew instantly that she had more than a friendly interest in him, and secretly resolved to ascertain if there was any likelihood of her winning the nephew and heir of the rich Mr. Lancaster, of whose history she already knew something.

Hence her queries and manifest interest in the young man when she visited Helen the following day.

CHAPTER XI.

A FEMININE PAUL PRY.

"AUNT ELIZA, who are the Seymours?" questioned Marjorie Ellsworth, as after lunch on that same day of her first painting lesson the two ladies repaired to Mrs. Sturdyvant's private sitting-room up-stairs, where they spent much of their time when they were by themselves.

The elder lady looked up surprised at the question.

"Really, Marjorie, I cannot tell you," she replied. "I only know that a Mrs. Seymour and her much admired daughter, Miss Helen, own and occupy that pretty cottage on the edge of the woods. The elder lady I have not as yet had the honor of meeting. Helen I have often seen among the young people, and I confess I think her every whit as lovely as report has made her out to be. I have heard that her mother is even more strikingly handsome—a veritable queen in looks and manner, in fact."

"It is the truth, too," interposed Marjorie, with an emphatic nod of her head; "she's perfectly stunning, as the girls say at school."

"I understood that she goes very little into society here," pursued Mrs. Sturdyvant, "although I know that she is invited everywhere with her daughter."

"Have they money?" queried Marjorie.

"I imagine not very much, although I have recently been told that Mrs. Seymour has a fine business in New York City."

"Mrs. Seymour in business!" blankly exclaimed Marjorie. "In the name of all that is wonderful, what does she do?"

"She has a fashionable dressmaking establishment.

"Bah!—a dressmaker!"

The unmistakable tone of disgust in which the ejaculation was uttered plainly betrayed the estimation in which this butterfly from Vanity Fair held the above-mentioned trade.

Mrs. Sturdyvant laughed out with amusement.

"Does the discovery dispel the illusion which has held you in thrall during the last day or two?" she merrily inquired.

"Good heavens!" said Marjorie, still overcome with amazement, "I never would have imagined it!"

"My dear, think what you like about the matter, but be very careful what you say when among our friends and neighbors," Mrs. Sturdyvant cautioned, "for I assure you that, in spite of the dressmaking business, which they make no secret of, the Seymours are held in very high esteem here. Even Judge Kendal and his family, who take the lead in everything, claim that they are superior beings and show them every courtesy."

"What about Mr. Seymour?" inquired Marjorie.

"He is an unknown quantity, as far as I am concerned, and, as I have never heard him mentioned, I have inferred that Mrs. Seymour must have been a widow for many years."

And Marjorie, remembering how regretfully Helen had spoken regarding the accident that had resulted in the destruction of her father's picture when she was a baby, concluded that her aunt's inference must be correct.

"I should suppose," Mrs. Sturdyvant resumed, with a quizzical glance at her niece, "that you, having visited the Seymours twice in their own home, might be able to tell me more about them than I you. You have the reputation of being a very observing young woman, you know; so suppose you give me your opin-

ion of these interesting ladies, particularly of Mrs. Seymour, since I have never seen her."

"She is all that you have heard her described to be—beautiful and stately in manner and bearing; 'lady' written on every line of her face and manifest in her every word and deed; but—if I am not mistaken, she is a woman with a history," Marjorie responded, with a thoughtful air.

"Indeed! What has given you that impression?" her companion inquired, with evident curiosity.

"The sad expression which sweeps over her face every now and then; the hunted look in her eyes, and a most careful avoidance of all reference to her past. Everything seems to center in that paragon—Helen and the present. They live in a lovely way," the girl continued, with animation, "not elegantly, but there is a daintiness and refinement in every room in the house that bespeaks exquisite taste, and also in their table and personal belongings."

"Really, Marjorie, you interest me. I believe I shall have to make Mrs. Seymour's acquaintance. I think I will go with you some morning when you go to take your lesson and make a neighborly call," Mrs. Sturdyvant remarked.

A servant entered the room at that moment, bringing the card of a visitor, and, as she was obliged to go below, the subject was dropped for the time.

Mrs. Sturdyvant really intended to seek the acquaintance of her neighbors, but, being a woman of many engagements, and having a great deal of company to entertain, she kept putting it off, and the weeks slipped by without her making the projected visit.

Meantime, Marjorie continued to go daily to the cottage for her lesson, and so wound herself about the hearts of Helen and her mother that they grew to be more and more fond of her, and looked forward

with regret to the time when they would have to bid her a long farewell.

She had so wormed herself into their confidence and made herself one with them that they conversed more freely before and with her than they were in the habit of doing before people in general of much that was connected with their lives and interests, although Mrs. Seymour was still rigidly reticent regarding her own past.

Upon two or more occasions the wily girl had, adroitly and in her effective innocent way, questioned her regarding her girlhood—where she had lived and been educated, etc., but Mrs. Seymour had cleverly evaded her and changed the subject, with a thus-far-and-no-further manner that had effectually silenced her.

There was one subject upon which Helen was also always silent, and that was her relations with Rob.

Letters came from him by every steamer, and Marjorie, always on the alert, was not unmindful of the fact, and was "just dying" to get at the true inwardness of matters. If she had dared, she would have stolen one of those precious missives—for, strange as it may seem, the girl had actually fallen in love with Rob Eggleston's handsome face, at which she often took a surreptitious glance—but—she had not yet descended quite so low as to be guilty of theft to achieve her desire.

She had also seen, one day, a missive, directed in Helen's ladylike hand, to Mr. Herbert Alton, and this also aroused her curiosity to the highest pitch. It really was only a friendly note, thanking the young man for some books and magazines which he had sent her from time to time.

So, in work and play—for the two girls had become almost inseparable, and one was seldom seen at any party, reception, or hop without the other—

the days flew by until the last week of the Seymours' sojourn arrived.

Marjorie had finished three or four very pretty things in water-colors, and won her young teacher's highest commendation for the nicety of her work.

"You would make an expert in a short time, if you could keep on with a first-class teacher, and it has been a perfect delight to me to have so apt a pupil," Helen observed, a few days previous to their departure, as she critically examined each piece before packing them to be taken away.

"It is very nice of you to say so, I am sure," Marjorie modestly replied, adding: "And I am going to have every one framed, to hang in my own room—when I get a home—as souvenirs of this lovely summer. I shall never look at them, dearie, without recalling the beautiful times we have had together in this dear little cottage. You won't forget me, Helen, will you, when you go back to your work, and I am away across the ocean?" she concluded, lifting a pair of wistful eyes, in which there were tears, to her friend.

"No, indeed, Marjorie. I am sure you will be far more likely to forget me, when you are having gay times abroad, and visiting innumerable places of interest. Then, too, you move in a very different circle, and will have much to distract your mind," Helen returned, while she drew the petite form of her companion into her arms, and softly kissed her white forehead.

"Do you think all the sight-seeing, good times, and gay company in the world could make any difference with my love for you?" queried Marjorie, with an injured pout.

"I am sure, I hope not, dear," said Helen, smiling at her mood.

"Do you think it would make any difference in your

love for me, if the conditions were reversed?" suddenly questioned the girl, with a startled look in her innocent eyes.

"Marjorie!" exclaimed Helen, in a wounded tone; "you know that it would not; environment amounts to nothing if the individual is pure, and noble, and honest."

"The world in general doesn't think so," objected her companion musingly; "if you haven't money and position, you are nowhere socially; you might as well be out of existence altogether."

"That is putting it rather strong, isn't it?" queried Helen, smiling. "I know it is so to a large extent, but it should not be, and I believe the time will come when money will not be the chief factor, in the world's opinion, but that men and women will be estimated and judged according to their real character and worth," she concluded earnestly.

"Helen, would you marry a poor man?" inquired Marjorie, sitting erect, and bending a curious, searching look upon her.

Helen flushed, then smiled at the question.

"I certainly would never marry a rich man unless I was sure he was worthy of my confidence and esteem," she replied.

"Now, you are trying to evade me," Marjorie gaily retorted. "Would you marry a poor man? By poor, I mean one who might have to work at some trade for a living, who could not give you a beautiful home, and nice things to wear, and for whom you might have to work, because you could not afford to keep a servant. Could you bear to wash and iron, bake, and brew, make all your own clothes, and, perhaps, have to play nurse, besides? Could you marry with all that in view?"

Helen laughed out merrily.

"What an appalling array of bugbears!" she ex-

claimed. Then she grew serious again. "No, dear; I think it would be very unwise for any girl to marry a man who was unable to give her at least a comfortable home. I think it would be inconsiderate and wrong for a man to ask a woman to marry him, if he could not do that much for her. But by a 'comfortable home' I do not mean a luxurious one, and, if"—the color warmly flushed her cheeks—"I loved a man well enough to become his wife, a very simple home would satisfy me; while, if he met with reverses after we were married, I should never be afraid of work as long as he needed my assistance in helping to rebuild his fallen fortunes. I should not even mind the washing, ironing, baking, and brewing, or even playing nurse, to the extent of my ability, if it became necessary for me to lend a hand so far, for I love to be busy, Marjorie, and I should be very unhappy to be idle, if my husband was burdened, although one naturally prefers to choose one's employment."

"Well, I just couldn't buckle down to a life like that," said Marjorie, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders, and an expression of disgust; "no indeed, not for the very best man living. I shall never marry any but a rich man. I should be perfectly wretched unless I could have a lovely home, and beautiful things to wear."

"Well, but suppose you could have all these to begin with, and then adverse circumstances suddenly deprived your husband of all his wealth?" said Helen.

A frown of annoyance gathered upon her companion's brow.

"Oh, well," she returned, with a note of impatience in her tone, "he'd have to manage to take care of me, somehow. And," she added, "my husband must also be handsome, cultivated, and everything that is nice. You see, Helen, I expect a great deal in my lord that is to be."

"Yes, and so do I," Helen gravely returned, and for the first time experiencing a sense of disappointment in her friend; "but I should gage him from a moral and intellectual standpoint, rather than from his financial and social position, and——"

"Well, and what?" queried Marjorie almost sharply, as our heroine paused.

"And I should feel that it was incumbent upon me to give just as much as I expected to receive. Marriage is not a one-sided institution, Marjorie, dear—or, rather, it should not be looked upon as such. It should be regarded as a mutual contract, under which each party should be willing and careful to make an adequate return for that which he or she expects to receive. Under no other conditions can marriage be harmonious."

"Heavens, Helen, what a 'goody-good' you are!" cried the little butterfly, with a ringing laugh that had a tinge of scorn in it, and impressed her friend somewhat unpleasantly. "How you analyze and dissect every subject! An adequate return, indeed! I wonder what I have to bestow upon my future liege in return for the hand, heart, and fortune which I shall expect him to lay at my feet?"

"I hope that you will, at least, have a true and honest love to give him when he comes riding by," said Helen, with a tender thrill in her tones; "a love that will make you willing to share his every trial, as well as his successes in life; for, dear, there is no true love that is not backed by the spirit of self-sacrifice."

"Oh, dear! What a humdrum, prosaic life this would be, if everybody took such serious views of it as you do!" sighed Marjorie, with another shrug, but with a self-conscious flush on her cheeks. "I expect you think I am just a useless butterfly, and too shallow for anything."

"No, indeed; I am sure that under your merry moods and apparent care-free existence there is a vein of pure gold, which needs only right conditions to bring it forth, that it may brighten and enrich other lives, as well as your own."

"Helen Seymour, do you really believe that of me?" exclaimed the girl, as she turned and faced her friend, laid her jeweled hands upon her shoulders, and earnestly searched her face.

"I certainly do, Marjorie," was the hearty response. "You know that mamma and I believe in looking for what is best in everybody. You remember the old saw, 'Think a man a thief, and you will help to make him one.' So, on the same principle, if you look for what is good, and noble, and pure in people, you will help to bring out those very qualities in their characters."

"Helen, I wish I might always live with you," Marjorie here burst forth, with a thrill of earnest longing in her tones, and with a sudden rush of honest tears in her eyes. "I believe that I could grow to be really good under your influence."

And she meant it; for once, the girl's better nature was aroused, and she longed to become pure and true, as she knew her friend to be.

"Dearest," said Helen, as she softly kissed her on the lips, "every human being must work out his or her own life problem; no one can borrow oil of his neighbor. There is good in every one, and he will grow pure and noble in proportion as he cultivates that good in himself. You must work for that result in your own sphere, I in mine—and I am sure, if we are honest, we shall be conscious of great growth in each other when we meet again."

Marjorie secretly wondered what their respective spheres would be, and her eyes drooped with a sense

of conscious guilt as she remembered a letter which her aunt had that day received from her mother, and certain schemes which had taken form in her own fertile brain, and which had been founded upon the information contained in that epistle.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. STURDYVANT PAYS A CALL.

THE letter referred to in the preceding chapter had been full of interesting news.

Mrs. Ellsworth had been summering at St. Moritz, a lovely village in the Engadine, and picturesquely located on the banks of the Inn, and she wrote that she had been having "the loveliest time in the world" with a party composed of English people and Americans.

A word regarding the woman may not come amiss just here. She had been a widow for ten or twelve years, her husband having been cut short in his career in the midst of the most flattering prosperity.

After one year of mourning(?), Mrs. Ellsworth had begun to mingle again in society, which to her, was the only life worth living, and from that time on she had been as gay as any girl.

She had a generous income, which enabled her to live luxuriously, and to gratify her taste for dress and show up to a certain limit, and she was pretty sure to find this limit every quarter—sometimes to exceed it, although not very often, for she found it "so uncomfortable to get behind-hand."

When her year of irksome seclusion was ended, she put Marjorie into a boarding-school in San Francisco, which city had been her home during her married life, and, having thus disposed of a tiresome responsibility, she prepared to enjoy her freedom to the utmost.

She had been abroad during her daughter's last year at school, and had arranged for her, upon her

graduation, to go to her sister-in-law, Mrs. Sturdyvant, whose home was in Buffalo, New York, and who had recently built herself a summer home in the Adirondacks. Thus we found them neighbors of the Seymours.

Mrs. Ellsworth had also planned to have them join her abroad in the fall, when she proposed to "polish Marjorie off" in the languages, and prepare her for the—to her—chief aim and end of existence—marriage with some scion of wealth and position—mayhap of nobility. Then, when the girl was well settled, and off her hands, she fondly hoped to secure to herself an eligible parti, and so float along through life at ease upon the topmost waves of luxury and pleasure.

But, to return to her recent letter. She described, in an enthusiastic manner, her location and surroundings. St. Moritz was the most charming spot in the universe, and had been usually gay during the season; drives, excursions, hops, and receptions had kept her in a perfect whirl of excitement. She spoke of numerous new acquaintances which she had made, and mentioned several old friends who were sojourning in the place, and who were also known to her sister.

"You will open your eyes, Eliza, when I tell you that Hal Lancaster is here and stopping at the —, which is not more than a stone's throw from this house," she wrote. "I have met him twice, and he was very courteous—remarkably so, considering the circumstance and quarrel of our last meeting. I am told that he has become very rich—although he was by no means poor in the old days—and he certainly appears to have an abundance of this world's goods, for he has the finest suite in the hotel, and sports an elegant equipage, with driver and footman. He has with him a young man—a nephew, and his heir, it is reported—a fine-looking fellow named Eggleston, of

whom he seems to be very fond, and who, in turn, evidently dotes on his uncle. By the way, the man's hair has turned as white as snow. Queer, isn't it, at his age? But it gives him a very distinguished appearance, and he is really handsomer than ever. I'd like to have Marjorie meet the young man. Suppose you close your house, immediately on receiving this, and join me here as soon as possible, for a little judicious management, just at this time, might result in the landing of a couple of very plump and desirable goldfish. Besides, I want you both to have a glimpse of this little paradise on earth, and, the season being much milder than usual, we propose remaining until the cold drives us away, which certainly must be within three weeks, at the outside."

Then there followed a number of commissions which Mrs. Ellsworth wished her sister to execute for her in New York before she sailed, together with instructions regarding the route she was to take after arriving upon the Continent, in order to reach St. Moritz with the least possible delay.

There was also a brief postscript to this epistle, which at once aroused Marjorie's keenest curiosity.

It read like this:

"Do you know what ever became of John Wilton and that girl? They've haunted me of late like a couple of restless ghosts."

"Who was John Wilton, Aunt Eliza?" inquired Marjorie, as she thoughtfully folded her mother's letter after completing its perusal.

Mrs. Sturdyvant flushed, and a shock of dismay thrilled her. She had entirely forgotten her sister's postscript, or she never would have allowed the girl to read the missive by herself. The "Wilton episode" was supposed to be a sealed book in Marien Ellsworth's life.

"Oh," she replied, with assumed carelessness, "he

was a young man of whom your mother was rather fond in her younger days."

"And who was 'that girl'?" pursued her niece, a slight frown sweeping over her face as she quoted the words.

"Well, I suppose she was regarded as your mother's rival," was the somewhat reluctant response.

"But what was her name?"

"Never mind about that, Marjorie," said her aunt rather shortly. "I don't think it would be quite fair to your mother to give it away, and I'm sure I can't see why she should have wanted to resurrect them after all these years. Now, what do you think," she hastily interposed, as if anxious to change the subject, "about closing the house for a fortnight earlier than we intended, and going at once to St. Moritz, as your mother suggests?"

Marjorie did not reply at once. She was thinking how strange it was that fate should have thrown Helen Seymour's lover into such proximity with her scheming mother, who already was planning a match between himself and her daughter!

How strange, too, that she should have fallen violently in love with Rob Eggleston, when he was more than three thousand miles away, just from having seen his handsome face in her friend's album!

She had really become very fond of Helen—as much so as was possible for one of her shallow, selfish nature to care for another—for she had aroused all that was best in her, if there was any best, and she experienced momentary twinges of conscience, in view of lending herself to any such plot, which, she felt sure, if successful, must result in the ruin of the life of the beautiful girl.

At the same time, her own inclinations prompted her to fall in with her mother's plans; so, after a brief struggle, during which self conquered, she told

her good angel to "go his way for this time," and said, in reply to Mrs. Sturdyvant's question:

"I am sure I don't mind, auntie; I suppose we might as well go one time as another, if it will not interfere with your plans; I have nothing to keep me, you know."

"Very well; I know no reason why we should delay, only"—with a flush of annoyance—"I must confess, I am not in sympathy with your mother's matrimonial scheme. I think match-making is detestable."

Marjorie laughed at the remark, but the flush that glowed upon her own cheek was not caused by annoyance, but from eager anticipation, in view of meeting handsome Robert Eggleston, the nephew and heir of the wealthy Mr. Lancaster.

So it was decided that they should sail a week from that very day—Wednesday. Consequently, in order to make the necessary arrangements, they would have to leave for New York on the coming Saturday morning, which was the day that the Seymours had set for their return to their city home.

Mrs. Sturdyvant set about her preparations immediately, and was busy and unusually thoughtful throughout the day.

Late in the afternoon, without saying anything to Marjorie, who was getting ready for a lawn party at a neighbor's, she slipped out, and wended her way toward the little cottage on the edge of the woods, to make her long-neglected call upon Mrs. Seymour.

Why she was prompted to make a secret of her visit she could not have explained, nor had she the slightest suspicion whom she was to meet. Marjorie's description had simply aroused her curiosity regarding the woman, and she seemed now to be impelled by some power stronger than herself and her pressing duties to seek her acquaintance, and see for herself if she was as "superior" as she was reported to be.

As she approached it, the little house appeared to be deserted, and a feeling of deep disappointment fell over her at the thought that she might miss the long-anticipated interview, after all.

But, as she drew nearer, she espied a white dress behind the vines which almost embowered the porch, and the next moment a tall, queenly woman, arrayed in a spotless robe of finest material and most stylish make, arose and came forward to greet her.

What was it that caused Eliza Sturdyvant's heart to bound into her throat, and the color to recede from her face, leaving it as white as a sheet, when she found herself face to face with Helen Seymour's mother?

"Margaret Wilton!" she gasped, and then sank upon the steps at the woman's feet, too weak to stand upon her own.

Mrs. Seymour was scarcely less agitated, but she was not wholly unprepared for the recognition, for, as we know, her suspicions that Mrs. Sturdyvant might be the sister of the man who had married her deadliest enemy had been aroused almost at the outset of Helen's acquaintance with Marjorie.

"Yes," she said, after a moment, during which she had struggled mightily for composure, "I am Margaret Wilton; but I hoped, after so many years of isolation, that I should never encounter any one who knew aught concerning my past. I seem to be fated—ah, the world is very small, after all!" she concluded, with a sigh, and suddenly cutting short her previous observation.

"It seems strange," she resumed, after a somewhat awkward pause, "that you and I have never met before during the summer, but I had begun to surmise, from trifles that Marjorie dropped from time to time during her visits here, that Marien Waldbridge might have been your brother's wife."

"Yes; and Marjorie is her daughter," faltered Mrs. Sturdyvant, with lips that were still pale. It seems almost like the irony of fate that she should have become so intimate with yours. I wonder, if you suspected, that you did not put a stop to it."

"The child is not to blame for the sins of her mother," gently returned Mrs. Seymour.

"You are very charitable," replied Mrs. Sturdyvant, flushing. "There are few who would not have feared the law of heredity, and visited the sins of the parent upon the child. I suppose you are amazed to see me here," she continued, "and wonder why I have come. I know—I have met Miss Seymour, and Marjorie has said so much about you, I felt a desire to know you, never dreaming I should meet any one whom I had previously known. You have changed somewhat—your form has developed"—her glance wandering admiringly over the stately, symmetrical figure before her—"and your face has changed in expression, but the features are the same. I was startled—appalled—to find in the popular Mrs. Seymour the Margaret Wilton of that old-time experience, for, although she afterward became my brother's wife, I always felt that Marien Waldbridge did you a great wrong. Of course, I knew about that dreadful scan—trouble, but I never believed what Marien claimed, and tried to prove, against you was true."

"Thank you for assuring me of this, Mrs. Sturdyvant," said Mrs. Seymour, her sad eyes lighting a trifle, although a spasm of pain contracted her features at her reference to the troubles of her past; "and let me add that there was not a word of truth in the whole story, although I admit that appearances were against me, but the whole affair was prompted by jealousy and spite."

"I know it—at least, I have believed so," her companion thoughtfully returned. "Marien was always—

well, I have not approved of a good many things that my sister-in-law has done, Mrs. Seymour, though, perhaps, I am saying more than I ought to, in view of our relationship. Of course, I do not know all that occurred before that fatal denouement, but I have always felt confident that she sprang that trap upon you from unworthy motives."

"That is true, Mrs. Sturdyvant," said Margaret Seymour, in a voice that shook with emotion. "I know that she hated me because of John Wilton's love and preference for me; but, if any one had warned me of her treachery, I never would have believed that she would deliberately plot to ruin my life out of a mean spirit of revenge. I never was untrue to my husband in word, thought, or deed, although she very cunningly made it appear to him that I was. It was all a miserable plot, and such a cruel thing to do—wickedly cruel, after I had taken her, in her adversity, into my heart and home, and trusted her like an own sister."

"It certainly was," said Mrs. Sturdyvant, in a tone of earnest sympathy.

A sob burst involuntarily from her companion.

"Oh, Mrs. Sturdyvant, I am sorry you came here to-day!" she cried, with a note of passion in her tones; "while I am grateful for what you have said in exoneration of my past, yet it is irrevocable, and it is only torture to have it recalled."

"Are you sure it is irrevocable?" queried Mrs. Sturdyvant, while she gravely searched the beautiful face looking down upon her. "I know that long years have elapsed since your trouble, but, if I could persuade Marien to make proper acknowledgment—confess her agency in the matter—would a reconciliation be impossible?"

Margaret Seymour shivered from head to foot at the question.

"Yet, it is irrevocable—it could never be; it is too

late!" she breathed, while, for the moment, utterly overcome by the agonizing memories of the past, she wildly wrung her delicate, white hands until every joint cracked. "And, besides," she began, after a moment, and trying to regain her composure.

"Besides what?" gently inquired the other.

"I know Marien Waldbridge too well to believe that she would ever humble herself sufficiently to confess the wrong—except, perhaps, to boast of it—which she has done me. It is a mystery to me," she added, with a sigh, "how one so depraved, so lost to all honor and womanliness, could be the mother of so sweet and lovable a daughter."

"You mean Marjorie?" said Mrs. Sturdyvant, a peculiar expression sweeping over her face.

"Yes; we have seen a good deal of her, as you know, during the last few weeks, and we have become very fond of her. She is charming in face and manner; so innocent, and confiding, and an unusually bright and talented girl."

Mrs. Sturdyvant had no reply to make to this high praise of her niece.

Marjorie was the only child of a dearly loved brother. She was fond of her, in spite of herself, and could not find it in her heart to betray her faults—glaring though she knew them to be—to strangers.

She arose from the step, where she had sunk, so overcome, upon meeting the wronged woman, feeling awkward and uncomfortable.

"Perhaps you are right regarding Marien," she said, referring to what Mrs. Seymour had affirmed about the woman humbling herself. "I know that she was very proud, defiant, and vindictive in the old days; but, as she expects that I shall leave Marjorie all that I possess, it is barely possible that I might have some influence with her now. I feel like asking your pardon for having intruded upon you, and awakened

such sad memories, and I would gladly do all in my power to right the wrong done you—if it were possible ever to make it right. I am going to my brother's wife very soon. Marjorie and I will leave for New York on Saturday morning, and intend to sail for Europe the following Wednesday. Now, are you sure there is nothing that I can do for you?" she concluded wistfully.

"Nothing; though I thank you heartily for your goodwill," was the firm but gentle reply. "Ah, yes," she added, with sudden thought; "you can do me a great kindness—if you will favor me so far—by allowing me to remain incognito. I have weathered many storms during the last twenty years, and I thought I had found a quiet haven, where no one would find me, and would, henceforth, sail in smooth waters. I live only for Helen, and, if I can shield her from sorrow until she is happy and settled in life, I shall feel that my work is done, and be glad to lay my burdens down, and go to my rest. She knows nothing of that tragedy of my early life. She believes that her father died before she was born, and I would not have her harrowed by the revelation of that terrible experience for anything in the world. Of course, I am helpless. I am at your mercy, and it is in your power to make us both wretched, unless you are kindly disposed to keep my secret."

"Do not fear," replied Mrs. Sturdyvant, with a reassuring smile. "I will not betray you, and I am glad that Marjorie and I are going out of the country, and that you will be relieved of the dread of meeting either of us for a long time to come."

"Thank you," said Margaret Seymour gratefully, and involuntarily putting out her hand to her companion.

She clasped it warmly, thinking, as she did so, that she had never seen a face more lovely, sad and grief-

stricken though it was, than that bending over her. Mrs. Sturdyvant gazed but a moment at that noble face.

Then, bidding her farewell, she turned away, and went homeward, feeling how unjustly and unequally things were meted out to people here in this world.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT ARDSLEY.

MRS. STURDYVANT and her niece left for New York on Saturday morning, as they had arranged to do.

Mrs. Seymour, however, informed Helen on Friday that she did not feel equal to the effort of getting away the next day, there was so much to be done; she had purposely neglected some things after her interview with Mrs. Sturdyvant—and she thought it would be best to postpone their return until Monday morning.

Helen was somewhat disappointed upon learning this, for she had anticipated much pleasure in making the journey to the city with her friend; but her mother's wishes were always first and foremost with her, and she accordingly yielded a cheerful assent to the change in their plans.

Marjorie called to take leave of them on Friday afternoon, and manifested much regret, in view of the approaching separation, while she was profuse in her expressions of affection and eternal friendship, and informed Helen that she should expect a letter by every steamer, and would be just as faithful in writing to her.

She mentioned, in a matter-of-fact way, as if it was of no especial interest to her listeners, that her immediate destination was the Engadine, and gave her mother's address.

Helen's heart leaped into her mouth upon learning this, for Rob was also at St. Moritz, and, as she knew that he would not leave for a couple of weeks longer, she felt very sure that the two would meet.

Nevertheless, something seemed to still seal her lips. Marjorie had never before mentioned just where her mother was located—she had merely said she was in Switzerland—and, as she was never curious about the movements of other people, she had thought no more about the matter.

She had never spoken of her relations with Rob to Marjorie, and she did not dream that the girl had the slightest suspicion that he was more than an ordinary acquaintance, or that she was in regular correspondence with him.

Mrs. Seymour watched the young lady more closely than usual during the last visit, and she wondered now that she had not observed certain familiar traits about her, though she had, as we know, had some suspicions that she might be Marien Waldbridge's daughter, yet she had been by no means sure of the fact until her recent interview with Mrs. Sturdyvant.

"Yes, she certainly has some of her mother's mannerisms," she said to herself; "but perhaps they are only on the surface, and at heart she may really be the sweet, artless girl that she has appeared."

Nevertheless, in spite of her charitable spirit, she experienced a sense of relief that she was going away so soon, that the friendship would be interrupted, and it would, doubtless, be a long time before the two girls would meet again.

But she allowed nothing of this feeling to become manifest, and she even tried to overcome it, feeling that she had no right to wrong the maiden by unjust suspicions of her sincerity simply because she was so unfortunate as to be the child of a treacherous and unprincipled woman.

So, when she arose to go, she took a kind and friendly leave of her, and gave her a tiny book, exquisitely bound in white and gold, remarking that, if she would make its precepts her daily guide and rule,

the very best wishes for her future which she could shower upon her would surely be fulfilled.

The title of the book was "The Greatest Thing in the World," by Drummond.

Marjorie flushed to her brows as she read it, and a wave of something like shame surged over her heart, for she knew that Christ-love—unselfish love—was the theme of the choice little work.

But she was equal to the occasion. She lifted a pair of tearful eyes to the woman, threw her arms about her neck, and put up her rosebud lips for a kiss.

"How lovely you have always been to me, dear Mrs. Seymour! Thank you so much for the dear little book. If I can only grow to be like you and Helen, I shall reach the height of my aspirations."

Mrs. Seymour instinctively shrank from the caress, in spite of the high tribute paid to her; but she forced herself to endure it, while secretly reproaching herself for the feeling.

Both girls shed tears of real regret, and there was a tinge of momentary remorse in those of one of them as they said their last "good-by" to each other.

But the ordeal was over at last, and the travelers went their way.

Monday morning found our friends also en route for New York, and by nightfall they were back in their pretty suite in ——— Street.

The very next evening Mr. Hubert Alton called, to give them a cordial "welcome home," and bring the loveliest handful of jack-roses that he could find.

He had not allowed himself to be forgotten by either mother or daughter during the six weeks of their sojourn in the mountains. Every few days had brought them some reminder of him, in the form of either a magazine, or paper, in which some article had been marked for their especial perusal; with, now and then, a letter containing bits of harmless city gossip,

also references to, and discussions of, the marked passages referred to above, and these he spared no pains to make entertaining.

He was greeted most cordially, particularly by Mrs. Seymour, who could never forget that he had saved her darling from a tragic death. Knowing him to be almost alone in the world, her grateful mother-heart had just gathered him into it, and her manner toward him was characterized by a certain confidence, and almost affection, which Hubert was quick to perceive, and which almost impelled him to make the most of, since he reasoned that she would be his strongest ally—if she could be won to that point—in the winning of Helen.

The trio spent a very pleasant evening together, talking over their varied summer experiences, and, before they separated, they had arranged, at Hubert's suggestion and invitation, for an outing on the following Monday, which would be Labor Day.

* * * * *

Monday proved to be a bright and lovely day—cooler, too, than the weather had been during the preceding week, and our three friends started forth upon their outing with anticipations of a most enjoyable time.

Mrs. Seymour had put up the daintiest lunch that her generous heart could suggest, and young Alton carried a mysterious box under his arm, and which bore the name of a noted caterer on its cover.

Their destination was Ardsley-on-the-Hudson, a fashionable resort about twenty miles from New York, on the New York Central Railroad, and owned by a wealthy club.

Mr. Rice, the manager of the firm during Mr. Lancaster's absence, was a member of this club, and had arranged for Hubert to spend the day at the place,

having given him a card that entitled him to the entree and privileges of the organization.

On arriving at the resort, our friends spent some time wandering about the lovely grounds, the sight being a most attractive one, just on the edge of the river bank, affording a grand view not only of the beautiful Hudson, but also of the hills beyond, which stretch up from its brink.

They also went through the club-house, which is a fine structure, containing every modern luxury and attraction, spent some time on the golf and tennis grounds, watching the various players, after which Hubert chartered a boat for a sail on the river, where they spent another delightful hour. Upon their return, the noon hour having arrived, they repaired to a pretty pavilion, to partake of their lunch, and also of some other tempting viands, which Hubert ordered from the casino.

They had a merry time by themselves. It was far more enjoyable, Helen affirmed, to lunch out-of-doors in that free-and-easy style, where they could have such an enchanting view upon which to feast their eyes, than to go inside the casino, and order from a menu-card, and be surrounded by the fashionable frequenters of the place.

Afterward, Hubert proposed another sail upon the river, but Mrs. Seymour said the sunlight on the water was too strong for her eyes, and she did not feel like going out again.

"You two may go," she said, not wishing to deprive them of their pleasure, "and I will sit here and read. I did not half finish the morning paper, and I would like to look it over again."

So the young people went away by themselves, the young man being secretly delighted at the prospect of having Helen all to himself for an hour or two, while Mrs. Seymour, drawing forth the paper from her



bag, settled herself for a comfortable perusal of current events.

She soon became so absorbed that she did not observe a couple of gentlemen, who came sauntering from the clubhouse, and finally established themselves upon a rustic seat just in the shadow of the pavilion, and where, after lighting their cigars, they fell into conversation.

It was not until the utterance of a familiar name attracted her attention, and sent an electric thrill to her finger-tips, that she was aroused from her reading, and to the fact that there was some one in her vicinity.

"By the way, I saw Jack Wilton a few weeks ago," one of the gentlemen observed to his companion.

"Ah! I did not know that he was in this part of the country," was the reply.

"He has been spending a portion of the summer in the Adirondacks, hunting and fishing."

"How does he look—like the same old Jack?"

"No; he looked old and worn—in fact, as if he had just got up from a fit of sickness. He has never been the same man that he was before that wretched scandal, years ago, although I've been told that he has been making money hand-over-fist ever since."

"That was a tough affair, wasn't it? Though I never dreamed that there was any trouble there until the bomb burst, and I never really got at the inside history of it, either."

"Well, it was all the outcome of a jealous woman's revenge, I believe. I used to visit there a good deal, you know, and I never liked the way that Waldbridge girl carried on. I had known Margaret Wilton from her childhood up, and I would have staked my life on her honor. This Miss Waldbridge had been a school-mate of Margaret's—she had lost both parents, and was absolutely penniless—who, out of the goodness

of her generous heart, invited her to come to her until she could find some congenial employment. The girl lived on her for more than a year, making no effort to get anything to do, and wormed herself into her confidence, only to abuse it. She herself was in love with Jack Wilton, and I was told that she deliberately laid the plot to compromise her friend—admitted the lover to the house for an interview, then brought the jealous husband upon the scene just in the nick of time to produce an infernal row.

"What a wretched little fiend!"

"Indeed, she was; but he was a high-spirited fellow, and, though I know he worshiped his wife, he would listen to no reason, or explanations, declared her false and unfaithful, and ordered the man to get out of the house, or be horsewhipped out of it."

"Whew! It was a devil of a row, I should say!"

"Well, Margaret was a sensitive creature, high-strung, as well as her husband, and, when she found that he would listen to no defense from her, she quietly disappeared that very night, and was never heard from since."

"Poor girl! And they hadn't been married very long, I believe."

"No, only a little over a year. My sympathies were always with her, for I know that she simply adored her husband, and, though I also know that the other fellow was dead-gone on her, I'd stake my soul that she was innocent of all wrong. I'm sure that that meddling girl was at the bottom of the whole disgraceful affair. I'd give a great deal, though, to know——"

But what he was about to observe was left uncompleted, for a messenger boy, from the club-house, appeared upon the scene just at that moment, and presented a letter to the speaker.

He hastily broke the seal, ran his eye hastily over

the enclosure, and then sprang to his feet, glancing anxiously at his watch at the same time.

"By George, Mortimer! I've got to go back to town by the next train!" he said. I'm deuced sorry to have our afternoon broken in upon like this, but it is important business, and I shall be obliged to excuse myself."

"All right, old boy. I know business must be attended to before pleasure, and we will run out again some day," was the good-natured reply.

The two men arose, and retraced their steps to the clubhouse, wholly unsuspecting of the fact that their conversation had been overheard by one of the victims of the scandal which they had been discussing so freely.

Margaret Seymour had sat, white and frozen, in the little pavilion through the whole of that trying ordeal, a look of haunting agony in her lovely eyes, her sweet mouth convulsed beyond all recognition.

She would have flown from the spot, had she dared, the moment she became conscious of what the two gentlemen were talking; but she knew that she would be recognized if she moved, and she had no wish to be identified by any old-time acquaintance; thus, she was obliged to sit out the interview, and bear it as best she could.

"Oh, God!" she breathed, as they disappeared. "I thought I had lost myself—that no one would ever find me on this side of the continent. Ah, this great world of ours is, indeed, a very small place, after all—and it seems almost an omen of evil that so many of those who have known of my past should just now have appeared upon the scene to confront me."

She leaned forward, and looked after the retreating forms of the two men.

"Yes, it is he! I thought I recognized that voice," she continued; "and, Henry Arnold, I bless you from

the depths of my aching heart for your brave championship of a deeply wronged woman this day, and also for your faith in me."

It seemed to the agitated woman as if she must go home and hide herself away from every eye, where she could give vent to the conflicting emotions that were raging within her; but she knew that this boon was denied her, and that she must assume as brave a front as possible for the remainder of the day, or destroy the pleasure of those with whom she was spending the holiday.

CHAPTER XIV.

HUBERT ALTON MEETS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

HUBERT and Helen did not return for more than an hour later, and Mrs. Seymour was very glad to have this respite in which to recover her composure, which had been so utterly routed by the recent conversation which she had overheard.

Even when they did come, she was not quite herself, and the loving, ever-watchful daughter was quick to observe her unusual pallor, and traces of agitation.

"Mamma, are you ill?" she exclaimed in a startled tone.

"No, dear," was the smiling reply, while the sorely wounded woman tried to speak with her habitual cheerfulness; "but I believe that I am a trifle tired. I think I have not yet quite gotten over our trip from the mountains on that melting day."

"Yes, it was actually the hottest day that we have had this summer," Helen assented. "But Mr. Alton and I have found the coziest, prettiest nook imaginable, up the river a little way, so we have come back for you; and he has a little gem of a book in his pocket, from which, he says, he will read aloud to us."

Mrs. Seymour would have been glad to have been left to herself again, but she could make no plausible excuse for refusing to accompany the young people, so they all sought the lovely spot they had discovered, which proved to be a little knoll on the border of the river, where the eye could sweep over the beautiful sheet of water to the verdant hills beyond, and here,

beneath the heavy shadows of a huge maple, the trio settled themselves for the remainder of the afternoon.

Hubert, before starting out that morning, had slipped into his pocket a prettily told story—"A Literary Courtship"—and a little book that could easily be read through in an hour or two, thinking, perhaps, that it might help to pass the day in an entertaining manner after they were tired of sight-seeing.

He read aloud for awhile, and then Helen insisted upon relieving him, and, thus, alternating, the story was finally completed, and was greatly enjoyed by them all. They talked it over for awhile afterward; then, finding it was almost six o'clock, concluded it was time for them to return to town.

Mrs. Seymour had not yet regained her color, although she had managed to maintain an outward composure, and her share of the conversation; consequently, neither Helen nor Hubert suspected that the day had been fraught with mental suffering which had required a spirit of sublime heroism to conceal.

Upon their arrival in the city, they sought "the elevated," which would take them more quickly on their way than the tram-cars, and within a short distance of their home.

As Hubert Alton, who was leading the way, mounted the last stair that led to the station, his glance fell upon a slender figure that was standing near the ticket office, and a terrible shock went thrilling through him from head to foot, as he instantly recognized the individual.

He appeared, however, not to have seen the girl, but went directly to the window, bought his tickets, then rejoined his companions, conducted them to the turnstile, allowing them to pass through before him.

He was about to follow, when he was again thrilled by the touch of a timid hand upon his arm.

"Hubert!" said an agitated voice in his ear.

Even then he paid no attention, and would have moved on, but the slender fingers closed resolutely upon his coat sleeve.

"Hubert," said the girl again, with a ring of decision in her tone, "you must wait, and speak to me! I know that you saw me when you came up the steps. You shall listen to me, for—I am desperate!"

He drew back a little out of sight of Helen and her mother, and then turned a scowling look upon the pale pleader beside him.

"How came you here, May?" he demanded roughly. "What are you doing in New York?"

"I came here to find you," she returned, gaining confidence, and flashing a glance of fire at Helen, whom she could still see, if Hubert could not. "I have been here five weeks, hunting for you. I would have hunted till I died!" she concluded passionately.

"Oh, you would?" Hubert retorted, his thin lips closing tightly, his chin settling into his collar with an obstinate air. "But, I can't stop here talking," he added, after a moment of thought, and shooting an anxious glance beyond the turnstile. "Tell me where you are stopping, and I will come to see you later."

"But will you?" the girl questioned, looking him steadily in the eye.

"Yes," he sulkily returned.

"When?"

"Oh, perhaps to-morrow evening. I can't get away during the day."

She gave him the name of the street, and the number where she lived, whereupon he turned abruptly from her, passing the turnstile, and then hastened to rejoin Mrs. Seymour and Helen, for the train was just coming into the station.

"Who was that pretty girl with whom I saw you talking just now?" Mrs. Seymour questioned, as he rejoined her.

Hubert flushed, for he had flattered himself that no one had observed his interview with the girl.

"Oh, she is the daughter of my washer-woman," he tried to say in a matter-of-fact tone, "and I stopped to speak with her a moment."

"Indeed!" said the lady in surprise. "What a genteel-looking girl she is!"

There was time for no more, for the train was at hand.

Hubert did not observe, while he was assisting his companions to enter the forward end of a car, that the girl had followed him, and slipped into the rear of the same one, where she sank into the first empty seat, and watched, with an alert air and eye, every movement of the trio at the other end.

When they alighted, she also got out, and kept at a safe distance in their wake, until she saw them enter the vestibule of the apartment-house in which the Seymours' suite was located.

Then the girl turned and fled back in the same direction she had already traversed until, having rounded a corner, she slackened her pace, and, with a weary sigh and step, sought a poorer quarter of the city.

When Hubert Alton, after taking leave of his friends, came out upon the street once more, there was an ugly frown upon his face.

He stopped a moment, and bent his head in thought; then, with a sudden start, looked up and down the thoroughfare, as if he half expected to find some one dogging him.

"D——n the luck!" he muttered angrily. "What under heaven prompted her to come to New York?"

Then he, too, went his way, with a quick and ringing step, but still muttering to himself.

After that life gradually settled back into its old grooves for Mrs. Seymour and Helen. The former

turned her attention to the orders which already had begun to flow in thick and fast upon her, while the latter went back to her beloved art for another year, and with only the brightest anticipations for the future, and not a suspicion of the fateful cloud which, even now, had taken form—although no bigger than a man's hand—upon her horizon.

Three weeks after her return from the Adirondacks, there came to Helen a long and breezy letter from Marjorie Ellsworth, together with one from Rob, which, of course, was read first.

Marjorie was just as innocently(?) chatty and outspoken in writing as she had been in talking. She gave a glowing account of her sea voyage, and her trip to Switzerland, described St. Moritz, its scenery, people, and customs, the guests at the hotel where she and her friends were stopping, besides giving many lively little experiences that were both comical and entertaining.

"By the way," she interposed, "I forgot to mention that we could not get rooms at the hotel where mamma has been so long, and so we all had to change to another; and whom do you think we ran across before we had been there an hour? You will be amazed when I tell you none other than Mr. Robert Eggleston—one of your school friends, whose photo I saw in your album—and his uncle, and, if you will believe me, it turned out that the latter and mamma are old acquaintances! They knew each others ages ago, in the West. I was, of course, introduced to 'Rob,' as he is called, and, let me tell you, he is even handsomer than that very nice picture which you have, and a perfect gentleman, besides. I think we shall be great chums when we get better acquainted. I told him where I had seen his picture, and that you had said you two were in the high school together. He spoke most kindly of you, and, I am sure, regards

you very highly—as any one must who knows you—even though you were not in the same class.”

Helen smiled wisely when she read the above.

“What a veritable child Marjorie is!” she said; “always speaking out just what comes first into her mind.”

“But,” she went on, turning back to the letter, “I do not think him nearly as handsome as that blessed old uncle of his. I said ‘old,’ but he isn’t, really, only his hair is as white as snow, and that gives him a venerable look. He is as stately as a king, and has the courtesy of an old-time knight. His face is like some delicately cut cameo, the features are so perfect, and his eyes—ah, such eyes, Helen! They are brown—something the color of yours, only they are not gentle, and loving, and sweet, like yours, but full of fire that dazzles and pierces to your very soul when he looks straight at you; yet, when he smiles, you forget all that.”

“He must be a distinguished-looking man, mamma,” observed Helen to her mother, to whom she had been reading the letter aloud, while she glanced swiftly back over those last sentences, as if to fix the impression she had received of Rob’s uncle more clearly in her mind.

“Yes,” Mrs. Seymour assented in an indifferent tone.

She had been thinking more of what Marjorie had written about Rob, and being “great chums with him.” Somehow, she did not quite like the ring of it, and there was a dull pain in her heart at the possibility that Rob’s affections might be estranged from Helen, and her life blighted as a result, even as her own had been by the girl’s mother, flashed through her brain, and aroused the solicitude of her mother-heart. Presently, Helen resumed her reading.

“It is getting very cold up here, in this little mountain town, and many people have already left, driven

away by the frosts and winds. We shall all go to Paris next week. I say 'all,' for there are a number of Americans at St. Moritz, and we have planned to go to that 'wickedest,' but most charming, city in the world as a party to spend the winter, which, I think, will be delightful, especially as Mr. Eggleston and my 'old-time knight' are included. This arrangement has changed our original plans somewhat, and I am not to go to Germany to study until later. Mamma says I can begin my German in Paris, under a suitable professor, which will be lots jollier than to go to stupid Deutschland, to be shut up in some gloomy pensione."

There was much more in the same strain regarding her anticipations for the coming season of gaiety, after which there were many expressions of affection, and assurances of undying friendship, and then she concluded with admonitions to "be sure and write every week."

After finishing it, Helen reread Rob's precious missive, and was a trifle disappointed upon realizing that it was not quite as long as usual. It was fond and newsy, but there was an indefinable something lacking in it, which left a sense of depression and unrest in her heart.

He mentioned having met her friend, Miss Ellsworth, "a pretty and interesting girl," and then did not speak of her again.

But Helen was so true and straightforward herself, there was no room in her heart for either jealousy or suspicion, so she resolutely put aside her slight feeling of disappointment, and told herself that her lover's delinquency would be made up in his next letter.

Every week afterward brought a voluminous epistle from Marjorie, and the girl kept up her innocent(?) pen-chatter about her "old-time knight" and "Rob," as she had familiarly dropped into calling them.

The "knight," she wrote, was making a veritable pet of her, and was her "ideal of all that was most chivalrous and charming in mankind." "Rob" was "handsome and clever," and they were growing to be "more and more friendly"—in fact, she "believed that he was the very nicest young man that she had ever met."

Each letter grew to be more and more confidential, until Helen began to have real heartaches because of a growing fear that Marjorie was superseding her in the affections of her lover.

Consequently, the tone of her letters to him became somewhat stiff and formal, and it soon became evident to her that his epistles to her were changing in the same way.

There was, of course, a reason for this, for, from the moment of their meeting at St. Moritz, Marjorie became even more enamored of him than she had been of his photograph, and made up her mind that she would win him, if it required all her art and all the trickery of which she was capable, to do so.

She began to work out her plot by first winning the heart of Mr. Lancaster, and, with her lovely face, her great innocent eyes, and childlike, confiding manner, this was a comparatively easy task to accomplish.

The gentleman was extremely fond of young people, and thus it needed but very little careful maneuvering on the girl's part to worm herself into his heart, and make a strong ally of him.

The very first time she met him, she played her cards very cleverly.

After being introduced to her, he kept her talking to him for some time, charmed by her pretty mannerisms, and amused by the fact that she appeared to be studying him.

Once, upon encountering her grave, earnest eyes fastened upon his face, he smilingly inquired:

"Well, Miss Marjorie, what is it? Are you trying to sound the depths of my character with those big eyes of yours? What is your estimate of me?"

She drew nearer to his side, as a trusting child would have done, and shyly, almost involuntarily(?) slipped her small, white hand within his.

"I was wondering——" she hesitatingly began, as she thoughtfully lifted her guileless glance to his.

"What were you wondering, *la petite*?" he questioned encouragingly.

"If—if I could ever have known you before," she said, with a charming blush and a quaintly modest air.

"I think not—I am not sure," he returned, still smiling; then added: "But what could have given you such an impression?"

"I am sure, I don't know," she musingly returned; "but, somehow, it seems as if—it is like a vague dream, you know—I had known and loved you in a previous state of existence."

Mr. Lancaster laughed out, as if greatly amused.

"Are you a theosophist, Miss Marjorie, and do you believe in lovers wandering for ages apart, and finally becoming reunited again?" he queried in playful mood.

"Oh, no! Of course, I did not mean anything like that!" exclaimed Marjorie, apparently very much shocked and embarrassed; "but my father died when I was very young, and I do not seem to remember much about him; yet—I have always cherished an ideal, and—and I think you come the nearest to that ideal of any one whom I have ever met."

She said it with such a confidential air, and with an inexpressible yearning in her pretty eyes, that the man was both flattered and deeply touched.

"You dear child!" he said gently, almost tenderly. "I am afraid that I am not worthy the high esteem with which you have honored me; but, if you have

yearned for a father, I can assure you that I have longed just as earnestly for a daughter, and I believe that you and I will become thoroughly en rapport as we know each other better," and he gave the tiny hand he held a very tender pressure as he concluded.

CHAPTER XV.

HELEN'S MOTHER.

AFTER the interview between Marjorie and Mr. Lancaster, as related in the foregoing chapter, the two were the best of friends—they became thoroughly en rapport, as he had predicted.

Marjorie was an adept in her art, and, believing her to be one of the sweetest, truest, and purest of girls, the man opened his great, generous heart to her, and his interest in, and affection for her, appeared to increase as their acquaintance progressed.

Gradually, as time went on, he began to weave a pretty romance, in which Rob's affections would, little by little, be weaned from the "dressmaker's daughter" and transferred to charming little Miss Ellsworth, until some day, perhaps, he would make her his wife.

The young man himself was also attracted to her—that is, he thought her beautiful in her way; her winning, guileless manners, her confiding airs, her frank, outspoken chatter amused and interested him, and he cordially seconded his uncle's efforts to contribute to her pleasure. But, in his heart, he never for an instant swerved from his loyalty to the dear girl whom he had so reluctantly left behind him in New York, and he was fully determined to marry her, with or without his uncle's consent, as soon as he could get well settled in business upon his return to America.

Marjorie let nothing interfere with her weekly letters to Helen, and every one was filled with praises of Rob and his uncle. But, as time went on, she wrote more of the former than of the latter.

"Rob and I are getting to be great friends," she wrote at one time. "I like him better and better, and, dearest—let me whisper a secret in your ears, for I know that I can trust you—I believe I am learning to care more for him than for a mere friend. I am beginning to think that he likes me, too. I know that I am not worthy to win his regard—I am such a butterfly—but, if he could honor me with his—his regard, I would try, oh, so hard, to grow up to him."

Of course, every missive was like a poisoned dagger in Helen's heart, and, as a natural consequence, her communications to Rob grew more and more constrained, while his seemed to reflect her growing coldness, and the intervals between them were longer.

At length about three months after Marjorie sailed, there came a letter from her, written from Paris, and telling, in confused but rapturous sentences, that which Helen had feared must be the outcome of these confidences.

"I love him, Helen, dear. With all my heart and soul, I love him; and I believe—yes, I do truly believe—that he loves me in return, for he has been very attentive, and I am sure that he has been on the point of telling me so two or three times of late, and yet something unaccountable has seemed to hold him back. I wonder what it can be! Oh, if I could only make myself more worthy of him—more, like you, dear. Perhaps he thinks me too childish and frivolous—I know I'm a great butterfly—to satisfy him; but I would try so hard to make him happy; I would, indeed. I would devote every day, hour, and minute to the study of his tastes and wishes, and I believe—yes, I am sure—I shall die if I fail now of reaching his blessed goal! And, do you know, I think that Mr. Lancaster, Rob's uncle, you know—Halburton Lancaster— isn't it an aristocratic-sounding name!— would really love to have me for his 'daughter'—as

he sometimes playfully calls me even now—as dearly as I would love to become such to my dear, old-time knight. Helen, pray for me—pray that I may win my life's happiness, and I will bless you forever.”

Helen Seymour was as white as a snow-drift when she finished reading this letter.

The last three steamers had brought her no word from Rob, and she could draw but one conclusion from the fact—that Rob had, indeed, ceased to love her; that Marjorie had won him from her, and henceforth her own life must be desolate.

She did not blame Marjorie—she did not dream that the girl had deliberately been making a dupe of her; or that, having known what her relations with Rob had been even before she went abroad, she had gone artfully and systematically at work to steal her lover from her.

She believed it was only a strange coincidence that had sent her friend across the ocean to meet her fiancé. The child was not to be censured—she did not doubt her honor, loyalty, or purity; it was, in her estimation, only the stern decree of fate that had ordained it so.

“Lancaster! Lancaster!” she murmured aloud, with a start, and referring back to a certain sentence in Marjorie's letter. “Why, I thought Rob's uncle's name was Eggleston, the same as his.”

“What are you saying, Helen?” queried Mrs. Seymour, turning from her desk, where she was making out some bills, to glance at her daughter. “Heavens, my child!” she went on, dashing down her pen in alarm, as she caught sight of the girl's colorless, pain-drawn face; “what has happened? Tell me, dear! You are ill! You are shaking with a chill!”

Helen arose, staggered to her mother's side, where she sank upon her knees, and buried her face in her bosom.

"Mamma—oh, mamma!" she moaned; "all is over between Rob and me!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Mrs. Seymour, and losing all her own color at her words. "Oh, Helen, don't tell me that your life is to be ruined—to become a blank, like my own!" For she well knew that, if what she had told her was true, the girl's heart would be broken, for her to love once was to love for all time.

Terrible as her own suffering was, Helen wondered at her mother's excessive emotion, and at the emphasis which she had placed upon the pronoun, for Mrs. Seymour had never before even hinted at any secret sorrow in her own past.

But, after struggling for calmness for a moment, she told of the fears that had been taking root in her heart, caused by the coldness and infrequency of Rob's letters, and the confidences and confessions that had filled Marjorie's epistles of late, together with the passionate avowals contained in the one she had just received.

She had skipped all such passages in reading the girl's missives aloud to her mother, for she could not bear to have even her "dearest" suspect that her lover was losing his interest in her—at least, until the crisis came.

But now the die seemed almost to have been cast, and her suffering was so intense, it was impossible to conceal it.

She finally read Marjorie's effusion to her, and Mrs. Seymour listened, with frowning brow and sternly compressed lips, rebelling in bitterness of spirit against fate that should have thrown Marjorie Ellsworth, the child of her old-time enemy, across the path of her idolized daughter, to ruin her life.

"What is that?" she suddenly interposed, in a shrill, agonized voice, when Helen came to that passage in

which Marjorie had mentioned Mr. Lancaster. "Lancaster! Halburton Lancaster! Great heavens! That man the uncle of Robert Eggleston!"

"That is what she says. How strange we should never have known his name, but took it for granted that it was the same as Rob's," said Helen. Then she added, in a tone of surprise: "Why, mamma, how strangely you look and talk! What do you mean by 'that man'? Do you know Mr. Lancaster? And what evil has he ever done you?" she concluded, in dismay, in view of the woman's white, convulsed face, and distracted manner, for she was wringing her hands wildly.

"Oh, Helen! Oh, God! Oh, fate too cruel to be borne!" she moaned, and staggering to her feet, gasping for breath, she sank upon the lounge that stood near, and fainted dead away.

All Helen's own agony was now swallowed up in anxiety for her mother.

She dashed her letter to the floor, and sprang to her assistance.

She placed her in a comfortable position, for she had fallen face downward; then, rushing for water, she bathed her head and hands, and worked vigorously to revive her.

She would have sent for a physician, but their servant was out, and she did not dare to leave her dear one alone.

"Mamma! Oh, mamma!" she breathed, in a voice that was husky from fear and emotion; "wake up! It breaks my heart to see you lie there so white and still! If I should lose you, too, now, what would I have to live for?"

But the blessed unconsciousness for Margaret Seymour could not last; she soon began to breathe again, and, presently opening her eyes, gazed wonderingly into Helen's pale, anxious face.

"What has happened?" she murmured weakly. Then, as memory began to reassert itself, she gasped: "Oh, that man!"

"Never mind him now, dearest; don't think about him or anything else; just try to wake up and be yourself once more," Helen fondly returned, as she softly kissed the pale cheek nearest her.

Then she went to get her a glass of ice-water, which she made her drink, and the girl was encouraged to see that she was refreshed and was coming more and more to her normal condition.

But presently, either from a chill or mental excitement, the woman began to tremble violently, and was shaken from head to foot, and Helen became greatly alarmed again.

"Are you cold, mamma?" she anxiously inquired, and without waiting for a reply, she drew up the soft, bright-hued afghan and tucked it close around her.

But Margaret Seymour was made of too strong fiber to succumb to either physical or mental weakness.

She lay quiet, with closed eyes, for ten or fifteen minutes, struggling mightily for self-control, until, by degrees, the trembling ceased, her tense muscles relaxed, and her strong will reasserted itself.

Finally she sat up, outwardly calm, a resolute expression gleaming in her beautiful eyes.

"Helen," she began.

"Oh, don't try to talk now, mamma," pleaded the fair girl, "just lie still and rest. If you could get a little nap I am sure you would be much better for it."

"Yes, I must talk—I could not sleep," returned Mrs. Seymour, with a strangely impatient gesture. "I must say what I have to say now, and then I never want the subject referred to again, for," with a spasmodic catch in her breathing, "I cannot bear it. That man——"

"Mr. Lancaster?" queried Helen, as her mother paused, her lips blue from suffering and the terrible tension under which she was laboring.

"Oh!" throwing out her hands, as if the sound of the name had stung her like a lash. "Yes, I refer to him," she resumed, more calmly; "but how strange that he should be Robert Eggleston's uncle! I have been very remiss not to have ascertained the fact; but, like you, I imagined that they both bore the same name. I inferred that he was Dr. Eggleston's nephew."

"Well, but what is he—this man—to you, mamma?" Helen inquired.

"Nothing! Great Heaven! he is nothing to me," was the passionate response; "but——"

"Well, but! Go on, please, dear, if it must be told, and have it over," said Helen, with starting tears, for she had never seen her mother in such a state before.

"He ruined my life, my child."

"Ruined your life? Rob's uncle ruined your life!" repeated the girl, amazed. "How could that be possible?"

Mrs. Seymour dropped her face upon her hands.

"Oh! how can I tell her?" she moaned, almost inaudibly. Then, after a moment, she sat erect again, a peculiar expression gleaming in her eyes.

"I cannot go into details, Helen," she went on, with pale lips, "but years ago, in my girlhood, two men professed to love, and sought to win me. One I loved and married—your father; the other still sought my society and persecuted me with his professions, even though I had repeatedly told him that I entertained not one particle of affection for him—that I was loyal to my husband in every breath I drew. I forbade him to seek me, for I could see that my husband was annoyed to have him around, and I finally refused to see him when he called. I sent him away without

seeing him again and again from my home. I learned afterward that in spite of my ungracious attitude toward him, he had been encouraged to believe I was secretly fond of him, and regretted that I had not chosen him—that I was not happy with my husband, and, one day, through the treachery of one who had long pretended to be my dearest friend and in whom I had the utmost confidence, he was not only admitted to my home, but was conducted up to my private sitting-room—was told, in fact, that I wished to receive him there in secret. He was only too eager to avail himself of the privilege, and, notwithstanding my undisguised astonishment upon seeing him enter my room and my indignant protest against his remaining there, he began to pour out an incoherent and passionate avowal of love, begging me, if I was wretched with my husband, to leave my home and go with him to some distant country, where he would spare no effort to make me happy. Just in the midst of this my husband walked unceremoniously in upon us, and overheard enough of what was passing to make him furious. He was a proud and impulsive man, and a terrible scene followed. Ah!" she interposed, with a shiver of agony, "I cannot bear to think of it even now! I cannot talk about it."

"Did he, my father—believe that you—his wife—were untrue to him?" Helen gravely and wonderingly inquired.

"Yes; his jealousy had been aroused; every circumstance had been most ingeniously distorted to make it appear that I was disloyal, and the cleverly arranged dénouement left but one inference to be drawn."

"And who plotted all this?—that false friend?"

"Yes."

"Who was she?" demanded Helen sternly.

"I—I cannot tell you, dear—it could do you no pos-

sible good to know," said Mrs. Seymour, after a moment of hesitation.

"Is she still living?"

"Yes."

"Did my father actually accuse you of being untrue to him?"

Her mother bowed a voiceless assent to the question.

"And then?" queried Helen, in a weak voice.

"And then—well I, too, was proud, too proud to argue, beg, or entreat him to forgive an offense of which I had never been guilty. I was wounded to the heart's core, crushed, and angry, and I went away without seeing him again that same night."

"You ran away from—you left him?" cried Helen, aghast.

"Yes."

"And you never made up with him—he never forgave you?"

"He had nothing to forgive, Helen," was the proud response, while the woman drew herself haughtily erect. Then she added, in a hollow voice: "No, we never made up the quarrel. I was too proud to make the first advances, and I had buried myself so effectually that none of my friends had any suspicion of my hiding-place."

"And—and then he died and you never saw him again! Oh, mamma, how you must have suffered, poor dear! And to think that I never dreamed of anything so dreadful. I have always supposed that my father died before I was born, and you were left to struggle alone," said Helen, sobbing in a heart-broken way over the sad story.

All her life she had yearned for her father, whom she had never seen—she had not even a likeness of him—but who she had fondly believed, until this moment, had been in perfect harmony with her

mother, and had passed away in his own home in spite of her loving care and devotion.

"Yes, and then he died—to me," wailed the stricken woman, as she sank back upon the couch, but her words were inaudible to any one save herself, for she had buried her face in the pillows, and Helen thought she was simply sobbing out the grief she could no longer control.

CHAPTER XVI.

ROB RECEIVES A LETTER.

HELEN wept in sympathy, and for several moments no sound save those heart-broken sobs was heard.

"All this happened before I was born," the young girl repeated again, as if this phase of her mother's sorrow had deeply impressed and saddened her.

"Yes. I, myself, did not even know that I was to become a mother at that time," replied Mrs. Seymour, with a weary sigh.

"How dreadful, mamma!—how desolate and forlorn you must have felt! And you were so poor, too, for you have told me that you had only a few jewels, which you were obliged to sell to support us, while I was a wee, sickly baby. You have had a hard, a sorrowful life, dear—how hard I never dreamed till now," Helen observed, in tones of deepest sympathy.

"We will not go back over all that, my darling," said her mother, more collectedly than she had yet spoken. "The past is past, and, until now, I had supposed it too deeply buried ever to be resurrected. I never told you this trouble because I could not bear to have it cast its shadow upon your young life. I wish you need never have known it. You have known something of my struggle with poverty—how I have conquered every obstacle and have carved out for you and me an eminently respectable position in life, and accumulated a comfortable little fortune for our future. I am proud to have achieved all this, and I am perhaps a better and stronger woman to-day than I should have been had I lived the petted idol of an

adoring husband and a life of luxury and ease. I am proud of you, also, Helen—of your high sense of honor and truth, of your career in school, your talent for art, and I feel that you are a lady worthy to occupy a high place in society. But”—and her usually sweet mouth settled into hard, resolute lines—“after what we have this day learned, I could never give you to Robert Eggleston; I could never let you marry the nephew of Halburton Lancaster, or allow you to be associated with him in any way, even if Rob had not proved himself unworthy of you by neglecting you and transferring his allegiance to Marjorie Ellsworth. Did you ever tell her anything about him?”

A spasm of pain shot over Helen's face at having her own troubles recalled.

“No,” she said, “at least nothing of our relations to each other. She saw his picture in my album one day, and asked me some questions about him. I simply said that he was a school friend, but she was very much taken with his face, and expressed great admiration for him.”

Mrs. Seymour sat in deep thought for a few moments. She was impressed that Marjorie was by no means the artless girl that she had appeared to be. Helen had told her about her talent for reading faces, and knowing that Helen could not speak of Rob without revealing something of the tenderness that was in her heart, she surmised that Marjorie must have suspected that there was more than simple friendship between them. Then, as she recalled her various letters, it seemed to her that the girl had been systematically trying to undermine Helen's confidence in her lover, and, if so, no doubt she had been just as artful in worming herself into Rob's.

“Well,” she said at last, but with pain-drawn lips, “I am glad we have learned the truth in time. I never could have given you to the nephew of—that man.”

Helen regarded her mother gravely for a moment. Then she observed, with a quiet dignity which she had never before manifested when speaking to her, and which betrayed a depth of character that surprised her listener:

"Mamma, whatever sins he—Mr. Lancaster—may have been guilty of in his past, they could never have affected Rob in my estimation. I could never have regarded him as in the least responsible for them. The simple fact that he is the nephew of one who had wronged you could not change my attitude toward him if he himself had been true. I should have loved him just as well and—I think it would have been right for me to be true to him. However, it is evident that something has changed him—that he no longer regards me with the same affection which he has hitherto expressed and manifested. If he has learned to love Marjorie, as I am very sure she loves him, I have no desire to stand in the way of the happiness of either. I shall write to Rob to-day, release him from all promises that he has made me, and return him his ring," and she resolutely slipped it from her finger as she concluded.

"Oh, Helen!" moaned Mrs. Seymour, covering her eyes with her hands to shut out the sight of her darling's face, for it was distorted with almost mortal anguish, "I cannot understand why you and I should have been singled out to be the special footballs of such an adverse fate!"

Helen started, then gave herself an impatient shake.

"Why, mamma!" she said, turning her grave eyes upon her in pitiful surprise, "you have always taught me that there is no such thing as fate!—that there is One who alone governs the universe and man. Dearest, do not let us lose our faith in Him. I could not bear that now, when I need an anchor so much."

Her voice broke as she concluded, and her mother

was conscience-smitten, in view of having been so selfishly bound up in her own sorrowful memories of the past.

"My darling!" she exclaimed, throwing her arms around her, "forgive me for being so weak and so thoughtless of you! We will not doubt, Helen—we will know that whatever is, is best, no matter how bitter the cup we have to drink, and while we have each other to love and live for we cannot be utterly miserable. We will try to put the past all behind us, take up the duties of the future as they come to us, and cling to each other only the more fondly because of the disloyalty of others."

"Ah! now you seem like my own dear mother again. I hardly knew you in that other mood," cried Helen, as she kissed her almost passionately. "Yes, dearest, we will henceforth live for each other and the good that we can do."

From that moment they ceased to speak of their sorrows; they quietly and patiently took up their burden, each striving for cheerfulness for the sake of the other.

Helen wrote to Rob that very day, as she had said she would do, severing all bonds between them. But, as he had made no mention in his letters of any attachment for Marjorie, she did not touch upon that subject, feeling sure, if things were as her friend had represented, that he would understand the matter without any reference to it.

"I have been led to feel," she said, "that it is but just and right to release you from all promises that you have made to me, and I ask that you absolve me from my pledge which, though informal, I may have seemed to make you. I can now realize the wisdom of my mother in objecting to a formal engagement between us, and you must allow me to return the ring,

which you requested me to wear as 'a souvenir of friendship,' but which I know really meant—when it was given—much more than that to us both. Believe me, Rob, I write this only because I feel it the right thing to do, and with none but the kindest feelings for you; and I want you to know that the most earnest wish of my heart is for your future happiness, and I sincerely trust that you will regard me as your true friend now and ever.

HELEN SEYMOUR.

"P. S.—I also return you the letters I have received from you since you left New York, and desire you will forward mine to me."

It was a cold, constrained note—almost cruel, Helen thought, as she read it over after writing it. It was blind, too, for she had given him no reason for her act; but she had taken Marjorie's statements for granted, and felt sure that Rob would read between the lines and understand.

She enclosed his precious letters—ah! how she hated to part with them—and his ring in a box, addressed it plainly, so that it could not possibly go astray, and posted it at the same time with her letter of dismissal.

This done, she felt as if she had buried forever all her dearest hopes in life, and set a seal upon their tomb; but, with a courage born of despair, she resolutely turned her back upon all tender memories and regrets, threw herself into her school work with greater zeal than ever before, and simulated a cheerfulness and lightness of manner, for her mother's sake, which she was far from experiencing.

When Robert Eggleston received the above missive and the box with accompanied it, he was simply paralyzed with amazement, wounded pride, and grief.

And yet he had, for some time, realized that some-

thing was very wrong with Helen, but he had not for a moment suspected that she would break with him entirely, like this, and with no more definite explanation regarding her act than her brief letter afforded.

It was entirely unlike her to be secretive and underhanded, and he was absolutely at a loss how to account for the congé he had received, although he also had long been conscious of a growing coldness and reserve in her epistles.

But he was very unreconciled. Helen was his ideal of all that was perfection in womanhood—he loved her with all the fervor of his nature, and he swore that no other woman should ever be his wife.

Marjorie had maneuvered very shrewdly to attain her ends, while her diligence and persistence were worthy of a far better cause.

At first she had pretended that she was not particularly attracted toward Rob, but, as we are aware, had directed all her arts to the task of winning Mr. Lancaster's heart.

She really made herself very attractive to him, and yet in such a modest way that he believed her to be all that was most lovable and beautiful, both in character as well as in person.

He petted her like a child, and she accepted his attentions in the same spirit, apparently, that they were offered, making no secret of her admiration and growing affection for him.

They came to be almost inseparable, and, as a natural consequence, the girl was thrown much into Rob's society, although, at first, she appeared shy and reserved with him.

But by degrees she grew to be more friendly, giving him, little by little, something of the confidence that she had bestowed upon his uncle; in fact, unfolding like a lovely flower, until he also grew to think

her very charming. And yet he did not entertain a single thought of love in connection with her.

She had told him, almost immediately following their introduction, that she had met an old school friend of his during her sojourn in the Adirondacks, and mentioned that she had seen his photo in Helen's album, while she was enthusiastic in her praise of her.

This of course delighted Rob's loving heart, although he listened quietly enough, and neither by word nor sign betrayed that he was more to the fair girl than the "friend" that she pretended to regard him.

But one day he received a dash of cold water, when, with her innocent eyes upraised to his to mark the effect of her words, she inquired:

"By the way, Mr. Eggleston, do you know a young man by the name of Alton? I believe he also attended the high school at the same time with Helen."

"Oh, yes," replied Rob, without a suspicion of the dagger that was about to be plunged into his heart. "I remember Hubert Alton well. He was in my class."

"Yes, that is his name—Hubert Alton," Marjorie guilelessly prattled on. "I never saw him, you know, but I imagine he is a very particular friend of Helen's. I know they corresponded, and he was continually sending her things—books, periodicals, and little tokens—while she used to speak of him in such a conscious way—with a lovely blush and that pretty light in her eyes—I felt sure there must have been some tender passages between them."

How well Rob remembered the "lovely blush and the pretty light" that were always sure to come to Helen's cheeks and eyes whenever he whispered some fond words in her ears! But it was like gall and wormwood to hear them associated with any one else.

Marjorie had been quick to observe both and draw her own conclusions on the day when she had discovered Rob's picture and questioned her about the young man.

She pretended not to observe how white he suddenly became about the mouth, nor the gleam of startled foreboding that leaped into his eyes at her perversion of facts; but as he made no reply to her observation, and feeling that she had said enough for that time, she changed the subject.

But, after that, she never received a letter from Helen that she did not mention the fact to Rob, while she always managed to ring in Hubert Alton's name, as if her friend was writing confidentially of him to her; when, if the truth had been known, she had never mentioned the young man but once, and that was in connection with her outing with him and her mother on Labor Day. Of course, the sly girl made much of this circumstance when relating it to the unhappy lover.

Helen herself had neglected to speak of the matter to Rob, when writing him, simply because the event slipped her mind, but it will readily be understood how the circumstance, though trivial in itself, in connection with the falsehoods that were told him, operated to arouse his suspicions and fears that Helen's heart was being won from its allegiance to him; and so, feeling that he was not being used quite fairly, it was not strange that his own letters began to grow constrained and reserved.

Some of them, indeed, never reached the girl at all, having been dexterously purloined by Marjorie, who was always on the alert for such an opportunity, and, now and then, one from Helen shared the same fate.

So that which was really only a mole-hill, gradually became a mountain, until the climax came.

And it was a terrible climax to Rob. It actually

made him ill, and for two days he kept his room, and looked so haggard and worn and wretched that Mr. Lancaster became very anxious and urged him to see a physician, little dreaming that what he had been so earnestly desiring had at last come to pass.

Of course Rob refused to have a doctor—he knew no doctor could reach his heartache—and was so strangely gruff and irritable that his uncle became perplexed, as well as anxious, regarding the nature of his indisposition.

He insisted upon sitting with him and waiting upon him, and was so solicitous for his comfort that Rob was deeply touched, although he would have much preferred to be left alone.

He did not feel like talking, and feigned sleep until he actually lost himself and dropped into a sound, restful slumber.

Mr. Lancaster, thinking to improve this respite, stole softly out into their little parlor, and seating himself at Rob's desk, drew forth pen and paper, preparatory to writing a letter.

Opening the blotter he was startled to find a letter lying open within it, and, it being a short one, a few swift glances made him master of its contents, and it was with a thrill of triumph that he instantly comprehended the nature of Rob's indisposition.

He had read Helen's note of dismissal.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN MISFORTUNES COME.

"WELL, upon my word! This disagreeable conundrum has been solved more quickly and more easily than I dreamed was possible!" Mr. Lancaster muttered, but with a triumphant gleam in his eyes, as he replaced the letter between the leaves where he had found it and closed the blotter.

He was so excited, in view of his unexpected discovery, that he could not collect his thoughts sufficiently to write, and, lighting a cigar, he settled himself in a lounging-chair, where, under the quieting influence of the fragrant weed, he gave himself up to meditate upon the situation.

"It is evident that it has been a tough tussle for him," he observed, directing a regretful glance toward the chamber where Rob lay, and with a twinge of conscience that made him wince, "but time, with a change of scene and plenty of excitement, will soon heal his wounds, and I'm sure he will be thankful, some time, that he was saved from making a fool of himself.

"Alton must be a smart fellow to have managed to carry his point so soon," he resumed, after puffing silently at his Havana for several minutes, but a frown settled upon his brow as he said it, and a blush of shame mantled his cheek, even though there was no one present to observe it. "Blast it! I suppose it was an underhanded piece of business; but I just couldn't have Rob's whole life ruined by such a mésalliance, and I feel justified—yes, I really do—in having employed certain measures to save him."

But his uneasiness, and the fact that he was trying so hard to silence the "still, small voice" within him, plainly betrayed that he did not feel "justified" for having yielded to the temptation that had assailed him before leaving home.

Many a night his sleep had been disturbed by visions of a fair young girl, with great, thrilling brown eyes that seemed to recognize and reproach him as the destroyer of all the dearest hopes of her life; of Rob, wandering restlessly up and down the world seeking to ease his wounded and ceaselessly yearning heart and finding no peace; of a bright young man, who, having been once tempted to dishonor his manhood for paltry gold, had steadily retrograded and ever afterward pointed an accusing finger at him as the author of his moral degradation; of his own loss of self-respect, and a sense of ever-increasing remorse, not only for that one unworthy act, but also for its detrimental influence and effects upon others.

Truly he had begun to realize that "the way of the transgressor is hard."

Something of this was haunting him now, for Halburton Lancaster was not lacking in morals and integrity—in fact, he had all his life prided himself upon those very qualities—but that very fact only caused his one sin to loom up the more glaringly in contrast with his previous honorable career.

But he tried to shake off the unpleasant sensation with an impatient shrug of his shoulders and a defiant toss of his grand, snow-crowned head.

"Bah!" he said, as if from a bad taste in his mouth. "I am getting morbid. I am making a 'mountain of a molehill.' I wonder, though, how the fellow has managed the affair! The girl's letter to Rob is blind. She does not accuse him of anything, and yet I can read between the lines, if he cannot, and understand that certain influences have been brought to bear

upon her to weaken her confidence in and estrange her from him."

He reasoned better than he realized, but of course he had no suspicion that he owed more to the self-appointed ally to his cause than to the man whom his gold had bought. The "mole-hill" remained a "mountain" for a long time, for it was many weeks ere these visions ceased to haunt him, or that he did not experience an uncomfortable sense of meanness and degradation whenever he encountered Rob's pain-clouded eyes.

But this feeling gradually wore away to some extent as the disappointed lover acquired more command over himself and joined their party upon their sight-seeing and other excursions.

As for the young man himself, as soon as he could conquer his despair sufficiently to think calmly, he replied briefly to Helen's letter, accepting his fate.

"Dear Helen," his missive ran. "I am constrained to tell you that yours of the 13th seems utterly incomprehensible to me, not only regarding the subject-matter, but it is entirely unlike yourself—unlike your usual candid, straightforward dealing. You have given me no reason for, no explanation of, the step that you have taken and which it seems to me I am justly entitled to. Nevertheless, I do not presume to judge you or criticize your decision; you doubtless have reasons that seem good and sufficient to yourself for what you have done, and your wishes are now, as they always have been, my law; therefore, I bow to the inevitable. May God keep and bless you always; may your future know no cloud or sorrow; and I am sure I do not need to tell you that, should you ever need or want me, you have only to write or telegraph but one word—'Come'—and I shall be ready for the summons. Ever yours,

ROB.

"P. S.—The box arrived safely, and with this I mail you the letters which you wished returned."

If Rob had not been quite so proud and hurt, if he had insisted upon learning Helen's reasons for breaking with him, if he had opened his heart to her, showing that her image alone dwelt in its holy of holies, how different might have been the result—how much of suffering both might have been spared!

But how often a fatal misunderstanding is caused by a proud reserve; how surely will the neglect to reveal the real self mar the course of two lives which otherwise might have been ideal!

When Helen received the foregoing epistle she was inclined to believe that she might have been a trifle hasty and unjust in her judgment of Rob; that she ought to have been more explicit and allowed him to infer that she feared some one else was transplanting her in his affections, and thus enabled him to explain and justify himself if he had been so disposed.

There was an undercurrent of intensity in the latter portion of his letter, in spite of his proud reserve, which had touched her deeply, and she now regretted that she had not written differently. What he had said about being ready for a summons from her if she ever needed him did not look very much as if he had forsaken her for another; and then, too, he had signed himself "Ever yours."

Ah! what if she had made a mistake! What if her act should drive him to Marjorie for sympathy and so into finally loving her!

But what was done was done, and she would have to abide by the result, although she felt in her heart of hearts that she should love and be true to him for all time.

Hubert Alton had been a constant visitor in the Seymours' attractive home ever since their return

from the mountains, and Mrs. Seymour, into whose good graces he had effectually ingratiated himself, encouraged his coming, especially after the break between the lovers, and occasionally accepted an invitation to a lecture, concert, or the theatre from him for herself and Helen.

Business crowded in upon her more and more as the season advanced, until she was forced to secure additional help; and this was an encouraging indication that her business was more prosperous than it ever had been before.

Helen threw herself into her school work with more than her accustomed energy, hoping thus to ease the pain in her yearning heart; but though she thus won the commendation of her instructors and made rapid progress in her beloved art, she could not forget. She grew thin and pale, yet wore a brave and smiling face through it all, and never uttered a complaint or made a sign to show how she grieved in secret over her blighted hopes.

And thus the winter came upon them, and one of the severest and most trying that New York had ever known.

Just in the midst of the busiest part of the season Mrs. Seymour was stricken suddenly and alarmingly ill, and for weeks was helpless, even to lift her head from her pillow.

For awhile her forewoman managed to carry on her business after a fashion, but it soon began to show the absence of its mainspring; complaints from numerous patrons poured in and work fell off to an alarming degree.

It was an intensely trying time for Helen, who would not allow her suffering mother to be troubled with harassing details, and so tried to throw herself into the gap, hoping thus to brave the storm.

It was more than she was equal to, however, for

she had no practical knowledge of the business. The help became disaffected and refused to serve under the forewoman, who had become ill-natured under her burdensome responsibilities and overworked them; and, after a month of mismanagement and misery, Helen in despair closed the establishment and refused to take any more orders until her mother regained her health.

It can well be imagined that her expenses were enormous during this trying time. The rent of the work-rooms and their apartment, doctors' and nurses' bills and medicines, besides the cost of maintaining their household, amounted to a sum that was absolutely appalling.

When Mrs. Seymour finally began to convalesce she also began to think of her neglected business; but her vitality and strength were so reduced that her physician said she must not think of resuming it for several months to come.

This verdict was a great disappointment to her; but her own judgment confirmed it, and, feeling that it would be ruinous to go on at that rate of expense while she waited to get well, the harassed woman gave up the establishment where for years she had carried on a thriving business and sent announcements to her numerous customers that she could do no more work for them at present.

That old adage, "misfortune never comes singly," seemed to prove true in the case of our friends, for, shortly after settling up her business, a trust company, in which Mrs. Seymour had invested the greater portion of the money that she had accumulated, suddenly collapsed, and, with the exception of a small mortgage which she held and a few hundreds in one of the New York savings banks, she found herself reduced almost to the extremity of her youth.

"We shall have to give up this expensive suite,

Helen," she remarked, one Saturday, when, after they had made an estimate of their limited resources, they found that their expenditures were far in excess of their income.

"Yes, mamma, that is a self-evident fact," Helen responded, and repressing a regretful sigh as she glanced around the spacious and attractive room in which they were seated. "But," she immediately added, in a cheerful tone, "we can be just as happy in fewer and smaller rooms. I will run out this afternoon and see what I can find."

"It will be hard to move," murmured Mrs. Seymour, with a shiver as she thought of all that such a change would involve at that trying season of the year, of her excessive weakness and of Helen's inexperience in all that pertained to such a responsibility.

"I wish," began Helen thoughtfully, and with an anxious glance at the pale, pinched face upon the pillow beside her, "I wish that we could go to a warmer climate—to some quiet place in the South, where we could live cheaply and you could get out into the sun and air every day."

"Oh, that would never do, dear; you must not be interrupted in your school work," Mrs. Seymour hastily returned; "you must keep on with that for this year at least. Give me the morning paper; I will see what there is advertised for rooms, and you can go out after lunch and see what you can find that will come within our means."

Helen would have much preferred to spend their little all and take the frail invalid South, but she realized that it would be very detrimental to her to leave the art school just then, especially if she expected to teach during the next year, which she felt would be an absolute necessity in order to keep herself and her mother from abject poverty.

So she spent that afternoon in house-hunting, and

finally decided to take a tiny apartment in an unpretentious street, and for which she would have to pay less than half the amount charged for the one they were now occupying.

They moved thither on the following Saturday, that being Helen's leisure day, and again, in this emergency, as throughout the long and trying illness of Mrs. Seymour, Hubert Alton came to their relief; indeed, he took upon himself the brunt of the moving, and was so deft and helpful in getting them settled that he aroused their heartfelt gratitude.

Helen actually began to regard him with a feeling akin to that which she believed she would have experienced for a brother, if she had been so happy as to have had one, and found herself leaning upon him and seeking his advice upon numerous matters regarding which she realized her inefficiency.

"I am sure I do not know what I should have done without you, Mr. Alton," she observed to him just as he was about to leave them late on Sunday evening, after having worked hard all day, "resolving order out of chaos," as she expressed it. "You have accomplished wonders. Why, I begin to feel at home already!" and she glanced appreciatively around the little parlor in which they were resting for a few moments and which had indeed taken on a very home-like appearance.

Mrs. Seymour had long since retired, completely worn out with the confusion and excitement of the last two days, and the young people were alone.

The young man gravely studied the girl's weary face for a moment before replying; then he observed, with a thrill of tenderness in his tones, for both her manner and words had made his heart bound with sudden hope:

"You know, Helen"—he had gradually grown into this familiar way of addressing her—"that I am only

too glad to serve you in any capacity and relieve you of every burden possible. I only wish that I might devote my life to soothing your pathway, saving you from every care, and making you happy."

The tone and manner told Helen more than his words. She shot one startled look at him, and then her white, tired face flushed a vivid crimson.

' Never until that moment had she imagined that he entertained a thought of love for her.

She had accepted his attentions and enjoyed his frequent visits in a spirit of friendliness, and because her mother appeared to take great pleasure in his society, while, too, she felt that they were doing him a kindness and perhaps throwing something of safeguard around him by allowing him to have the freedom of their house and regard it as a kind of home.

It is true that of late he had been so more than kind during her time of sore trial and responsibility, her regard for him had strengthened, and she was grateful to him from the depths of her heart; but love—she had none to give him—that was forever in the keeping of another.

"I have startled you," Hubert remarked, as he observed her look of blank astonishment and her flush of embarrassment. "Perhaps I should not have told you this just yet; but, Helen, I do love you with——"

She threw out her hand with a gesture of mingled pain and repulsion.

"Don't!" she cried, in a voice that was husky from emotion, "you must not talk like that to me! Oh, I thought you were my kind, true friend; why have you spoiled it all!"

"Forgive me," said the young man humbly. "I am your true friend; I am more than that; but I see I have made a mistake. You are tired out and I should have been more considerate. But, dear, I cannot help loving you. You won my heart long, long ago, when

we were in school, and I can no more change the fact than the sea can stop its ebb and flow."

"No, no!" almost sobbed Helen, and trembling like a leaf.

He arose and went to her side, looking down upon her with all his heart in his eyes.

"We will not talk more of this now, Helen," he said gently. "Perhaps another time when you are rested you will think more kindly of what I have said. Good night."

And he was gone before she could reply.

CHAPTR XVIII.

MRS. SEYMOUR ENCOURAGES HUBERT.

HELEN was appalled by Hubert's confession of love for her, and the moment she heard the hall door close after him she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

She was very weary after her long day of almost unremitting toil, for she had wished to do all that she could toward getting settled, as she would be obliged to go into school again on the morrow; consequently she was the more easily upset by the wholly unexpected declaration to which she had been forced to listen.

Besides, it had aroused all the old pain and sorrow for her own disappointed hopes in connection with Rob, and she wept in a perfect abandonment of grief, regardless of the lateness of the hour, that she was exhausting what little strength she had left or of aught else save her own desolation—her blighted life.

But she was suddenly recalled to herself by the voice of her mother who, having aroused from the slumber into which she had fallen, called out in a weak voice:

"Helen, where are you? What are you doing?"

The exhausted girl wiped her tears and hushed her sobs, and went to answer the call.

"What were you doing, dear?" repeated Mrs. Seymour, as she entered her room. "Surely it must be very late."

"Yes, it is late, but I was resting for a few mo-

ments before going to bed," Helen replied, not quite truthfully, although she had been sitting for the first time in hours.

She tried to speak naturally, for she did not wish her mother to know that she had been weeping, and she was thankful that the room was not lighted to betray her tear-stained face.

But the loving heart could not be deceived; the quick ear caught the unnatural tone, and knew at once that something had gone wrong with her dear one.

"Helen, you have been crying!" she said, with a sharp note of anxiety in her voice. "What has grieved you?"

"Dear mamma, don't mind me; it is nothing but what I shall get over. I am just dead tired and there is no use denying it. My nerves got the better of me, and I had to open the safety-valve and have my little weep," Helen replied, with a little conscious laugh and trying to make light of her weakness.

"Poor child! poor child!" moaned the invalid tremulously.

"Hush, dearest! I'm not going to be made a baby of after all the work I've done to-day," said the girl, with playful authority. "You have no idea how much we have accomplished this evening," she rattled on, to turn attention from herself. "You will hardly know the rooms when you see them in the morning. Mr. Alton has worked like a steam-engine; he is a perfect wonder for executive ability, and you will be just astonished to see how nearly settled we are."

"Yes, Hubert is a dear boy—as faithful as a son," said Mrs. Seymour, appreciatively, and wholly unconscious of the shiver that shook Helen from head to foot at those last words. "But you both have done too much. I wish I could have helped you instead of

being obliged to lie here a useless burden," she concluded plaintively.

Helen bent down and caressed her fondly.

"You mustn't say that," she said tenderly, "for you are the most precious object in life to me. Now let me get you a glass of milk or a drink of hot beef tea before you go to sleep again."

"No indeed, dear; go yourself straight to bed and get your rest, or you also will be ill to-morrow," said the sick woman, with an anxious sigh.

Helen dropped another gentle kiss upon the pale face on the pillow, then sought her own room, and ere long the tiny suite had settled into silence.

But the following morning broke cloudless and glorious, and the world looked somewhat different to our friends. Mrs. Seymour had slept well and seemed much stronger than yesterday; Helen also had rested, and the little apartment wore so cheerful and home-like an aspect, with the bright sun streaming into the small dining room and warm kitchen that both mother and daughter felt greatly comforted.

Helen prepared breakfast and was made happy by the fact that Mrs. Seymour enjoyed the meal and ate heartily. Then she put the rooms in order, made her mother as comfortable as she could for the day, after which she hurried away to her school.

Their new home was so far from the art school that she was obliged to take her lunch, and so could not return until late in the afternoon.

This was a matter of keen regret and anxiety to her, for she had concluded that they could not afford to keep a servant, and she did not like to leave her mother so long alone in her present weak state.

Hubert Alton, knowing that Helen would be absent all day, arranged to drop in upon Mrs. Seymour during the noon hour, and brought with him a most tempting basket of dainties for the invalid.

He boldly stated that he had come uninvited to lunch with her, after which he intended to finish tacking down the hall carpet, which he had been obliged to leave the night previous.

They had a merry time together, for Hubert said that he knew how to cook oysters to perfection, and insisted upon getting the lunch under Mrs. Seymour's supervision. He made so comical an appearance in his shirt-sleeves and long apron, and jested so good-naturedly over his awkwardness, that she laughed as she had not done since before her illness.

When all was ready they sat down in the best of spirits to enjoy the results of the new cook's efforts, and, during their meal, Hubert told his companion of his confession to Helen the night before.

Mrs. Seymour's heart beat rapidly as she listened; she was both excited and elated, for she had really grown very fond of the young man, and believed him to be all that was kind and noble and true, as he appeared; while, for reasons best known to herself, she had turned directly against Robert Eggleston, was determined Helen should never marry him, and would have sacrificed a great deal if she could have rooted all affection for him out of her heart.

She knew that Hubert was receiving a fair salary, that he was faithful to his business, and had prospects of promotion, and if he loved Helen and could win her, she believed he would make her a good husband.

He was unusually capable in many ways, and, although not so fine-looking, cultured, and polished as Rob, she felt sure that he was bound to rise in the world.

She had been greatly disturbed upon learning that Halburton Lancaster—the man with whom the sorrows of her early life had been so closely connected—had been located in New York for years, and was

Hubert's employer as well as Rob's uncle, and she would have been glad if Alton could have found as good a situation with some one else.

But, of course, she could not interfere with his business, and, believing that she could still preserve her incognito in the future, as in the past, that Mr. Lancaster would never identify Mrs. Seymour, the fashionable modiste, with the Margaret Wilton of other days, she resolved to let well enough alone, and if Hubert wanted to win Helen, and Helen could be induced to look favorably upon his suit, she would help his cause along in every possible way.

So she listened to the story of his avowal to Helen with all the interest and sympathy that he could desire, and even grew quite confidential while discussing the matter with him.

"Perhaps you do not know that Helen was quite fond of Robert Eggleston before he went abroad," she observed, thinking it best that he should not be allowed to pay court to her blindfolded.

"Yes, I do," he returned, flushing. "I know that they were very fond of each other as long ago as they were in the high school; I was jealous of Rob even then."

"Were you! Have you cared for Helen as long as that?" exclaimed Mrs. Seymour, greatly surprised.

"Yes," he gravely replied.

"Well, I am sure you do not know that, before Bob went away, they were the same as pledged to each other, although I would not allow any formal engagement, and—and his uncle did not wish it, either," Mrs. Seymour further confided to him.

Hubert of course had not known this, and the information enlightened him considerably regarding Mr. Lancaster's proposals to him. He even surmised, what was really true, that the young lover had been whisked out of the country for the express purpose

of getting him out of the way of the "dressmaker's" pretty daughter while somebody else was bribed to win her.

"I like Rob right well myself," his companion went on. "We saw a good deal of him, first and last, and he certainly seemed to be one of the truest, most manly fellows that I ever knew. But for some reason he has given Helen the cold shoulder of late; indeed, they have ceased to correspond, and have returned each other's letters; the affair is entirely broken off."

Hubert's heart bounded with joy at this intelligence. He had never really known how far matters had progressed between the lovers, although he had surmised enough to make him exceedingly jealous and uncomfortable.

"Then they have corresponded since Rob went abroad," he remarked, with the hope of getting a deeper insight into the affair.

"Yes, until a few weeks before my illness," Mrs. Seymour responded. "Of course, Helen has been pretty well broken up over it, and I imagine that was why she was so overcome last night when you spoke to her; you aroused harrowing memories. I wondered what was troubling her when she came to say good night to me after you left, and questioned her; but she evaded me, and I hadn't a suspicion of the truth until now."

"I am sorry if I wounded her," said the young man, regretfully, "but, truly, Mrs. Seymour, I adore Helen, and I believe that my whole life will be a blank if I cannot win her."

"That would not be right," returned his companion, in a tone of gentle reproof; "it would not show a brave, strong, or manly spirit. We all have our disappointments in life"—with a weary sigh—"but it is our duty to face them courageously and rise above them."

"That sounds well as a theory, but to meet and overcome, to rise above the loss of one loved as I love Helen, would require the spirit of a hero," said Hubert, with a thrill of passion in his voice.

Mrs. Seymour was white to her lips as she quietly rejoined:

"But there have been many such heroes in the world, and they have come forth from such ordeals better, stronger, and purer, and so have helped the world to be better."

Hubert Alton began to grow inwardly restive at the turn the conversation had taken, for he never could endure to be "preached at," as he would have expressed it.

He sat silent for a moment or two, then asked:

"Do you imagine that, if I am patient and faithful, if I do not force myself unduly upon Helen, but simply try to prove myself worthy of her, there will be any hope for me?"

Mrs. Seymour flushed now. She felt that she had no moral right to bid him hope, and yet his earnestness and ardent attachment for Helen touched her deeply.

"I cannot, I fear, give you the encouragement you seek," she kindly returned. "Helen is a girl of very strong character, and if she still retains her affection for Rob, I am sure she would never give herself to any one else. Still——"

"Would you be willing to receive me as a son if I could win her?" interposed Hubert, but he was very white under the blow that he had received.

The beautiful woman turned to him with a tremulous smile.

"You certainly have been very much like a dear son to me, Hubert, during the last few trying months, and I have become very fond of you," she said gratefully.

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Seymour, for saying that to

me. Then you are willing that I shall try to win Helen?" he eagerly exclaimed.

"Helen is my idol, my one treasure in life," gravely returned Mrs. Seymour, "and my most earnest desire is for her happiness. Marriage without true love is always a failure, and I could not wish her to give her hand to any man without her heart; but if, in time, you can win both, I shall bestow upon you my hearty blessing."

Hubert held out his hand, apparently too overcome, in view of what she had said, to make any verbal reply; though in his heart he was secretly exultant, and was saying to himself.

"I will win her! Helen and the ten thousand shall both be mine."

Mrs. Seymour cordially clasped the hand extended to her, whereupon he silently and reverently raised it to his lips and then released it.

Their lunch finished, Hubert at once set himself at work, and with such good results that not only was the hall carpet laid, but several pictures and portières hung before he left to return to his office.

He came again in the evening to "finish up," he said, but by neither word nor sign did he betray to Helen that he remembered the interview of the previous night.

He worked with unflagging interest, and was so helpful in hanging lace curtains, arranging bric-à-brac, and doing a hundred other things, besides being merry and entertaining over his work, that Mrs. Seymour apparently forgot her bodily ills and misfortunes in her enjoyment of his presence; while Helen, happy to see her mother so much more like her old self, unbent to him even more than usual, in spite of what had occurred, which so elated the young man that he finally went away very light of heart and hopeful for the future.

All winter long he continued to be a constant and welcome visitor in their home, and, by Mrs. Seymour at least, was regarded almost as one of the family.

He could see, although they never even hinted at the fact, that they were often hard pressed for the funds necessary to meet their expenses, and he delicately lightened many a burden for them, many a delicacy found its way into the house, and substantials also, under cover of inviting himself to lunch, or to a Sunday dinner. He was their errand boy, their counselor, their standby in every emergency, until both women felt that they could scarcely live without him.

And yet, during all this time, he never once renewed his suit with our heroine—never referred to it in the remotest manner. But—he was biding his time, worming his way into their hearts and confidence with an unchangeable determination to gain his point—to win the girl he loved and the dowry of ten thousand dollars that had been promised with the winning.

So spring came around, the weather grew suddenly warm, and people began to flit away to their country homes.

Mrs. Seymour continued to be very delicate; she did not regain her strength, and a troublesome cough was a source of constant anxiety to Helen, although she was up and about the house most of the time, and even able to perform some of the lighter household duties.

But when May came in and the days grew longer and hotter, she began to wilt perceptibly, and her physician said, with a grave look in his eyes, that she must get out of the city without delay.

CHAPTER XIX.

ADVICE.

"If you would regain your health and strength you must get away from the city at once."

It sounded very simple—it was an easy matter to talk of going into the country to regain one's health, but Mrs. Seymour's resources, as well as her strength, were almost exhausted, and stern, relentless poverty was staring her in the face.

Instead of getting out of the city, they had been planning to remain in it, with the hope of finding some light work to do, as soon as Helen was released from school, to eke out their scanty means, and, besides this, they had planned to rent their cottage in the Adirondacks, which would help greatly toward giving them a comfortable living; but, as yet, they had received no application for it, although it had been advertised for some time.

And now the physician's decree had fallen upon their defenseless heads like a cruel blow.

They could not afford to keep their suite in town and go to their cottage; they had no money to spend in moving their furniture thither, or even to store it in the city during their absence, to say nothing about the expense of railway tickets and their living during the summer.

Mrs. Seymour was utterly prostrated again from the anxiety which their desperate situation aroused; the battle of life began to seem hardly worth the fighting.

"I am sure I do not know what we are going to do," she remarked to Hubert one evening, after hav-

ing confided to him how fearfully straitened their circumstances were becoming. "All the money we have in the world is about one hundred dollars, besides the interest on a small mortgage which I hold, that will not be due until the middle of October, and which amounts to very little anyway. Oh, Hubert, for the first time in my life I am inclined to doubt that a wise Providence governs our lives."

The young man had listened to her with a very grave face, but in his heart he was secretly exulting, for he believed that this dire extremity would prove to be his opportunity.

He had never spoken of love to Helen since the memorable interview already described; her attitude, although kind and even sisterly at times, had not encouraged him to do so.

But he had been patient and faithful—he had studied her every mood and need and wish, and while he felt that she might never be willing to marry him as long as their circumstances were prosperous and they were independent, yet she might perhaps be willing to sacrifice herself under the present pressure to save her idolized mother's life.

The decree had gone forth: Mrs. Seymour must go into the country, or to the seashore, if she would live; her life would pay the forfeit if she remained in the city during the hot season.

Hubert could understand from what Mrs. Seymour told him that either country or seashore was an impossibility, and Helen's white face and heavy eyes betrayed but too plainly how keenly she was suffering in view of the fact.

Now, then was the time for him to make a bold venture to carry out his long-cherished scheme, making the most of this emergency.

What if Helen did not love him? He fondly imagined that when she was once his wife it would be a

comparatively easy matter to win her love. At all events, he would thus secure the ten thousand dollars that Mr. Lancaster had promised him, and which would be a good foundation upon which to rear a fortune for himself, and also, with his salary, enable him to give Helen and her mother every comfort.

"I am very, very sorry, dear Mrs. Seymour," he said, in a tone of earnest sympathy in reply to her confidential communication, "and now, knowing of my affection for you, you will surely allow me to assist you to——"

The proud-spirited woman threw out her wasted hand in a gesture that told how deeply she was wounded by the offer of financial aid, while her wan face flushed hotly.

"Don't!" she said, in an almost inaudible voice. "I have not yet quite reached the point where I can accept of charity."

"Forgive me if I seemed to imply anything of the kind," Hubert humbly returned. "I only meant it as an offering of love for all your kindness to me; you know your house has been a kind of home to me for a long time. But you must let me help you over this rough spot in some way. I have a good salary—have saved up quite a snug little sum during the last year, and if you would like this proposal any better—I would gladly lend you what is necessary for this summer outing."

"No, no, my dear boy; I could not use your hard-earned money," replied the sick woman, deeply touched by what he had said. "Suppose I should—die; how would you ever be paid?" she concluded, with white, trembling lips.

"But you will not," he asserted reassuringly; "you will get well and strong in the pure, fresh air and on a good, wholesome diet, and come back in the fall to resume your business and begin to flourish again."

"No, Hubert, it is out of the question. I could not accept such a favor or place myself under such a heavy obligation," Mrs. Seymour firmly responded.

"If I were your son you would not feel so—you would not say that to me," the young man shrewdly pleaded.

"That would be different," he said.

"Nay," he gently insisted, "I have grown to feel toward you almost as if you were my own mother, and I should love to do this for you."

The woman lifted her heavy eyes and scanned his face eagerly, and she could not fail to be impressed by what she saw; for he knew what he was about—his whole heart was set upon his scheme, and he was flushed and his eyes all aglow from the earnestness of his purpose.

"I really believe you would," she said, with a wistful sigh, and as if she were almost inclined to yield. Then, after a moment of thought, she added decisively: "But no—I could not consent to any such arrangement."

Nevertheless, the long-drawn sigh which supplemented her decision told her companion that she yearned to rely upon him and his proffered assistance.

Sad and beset with trials as her life had been, she still clung to it for the sake of Helen. She did not want to die—she could not die and leave her alone in the world. She must live, she told herself, at least until she could see her well settled in life and know she would be kindly cared for.

And yet, knowing how deeply rooted the girl's affection for Rob had been, there seemed but very little prospect that she would marry any one—at least, for a long while to come.

She found herself wishing just now, and very earnestly, that Helen could learn to love Hubert well enough to become his wife; but that was a mat-

which her delicacy would not allow her to suggest either to him or to her.

But Hubert had had it in mind all the time, and had worked his scheme very well so far.

He had not believed when he proposed it that Mrs. Seymour would accept any financial assistance from him; indeed, he would have been greatly chagrined had she done so.

But he had made the proposition for the sake of appearing personally disinterested—that Helen might not think, when he renewed his suit to her, that he was bringing any pressure of that kind to bear upon her to influence her in his favor.

He knew that gratitude is a powerful incentive. He knew, of course, that Helen would learn of his talk with her mother, and he wished, first of all, to win her gratitude.

The next day would be Sunday, and Hubert determined to strike while the iron was hot, and, eager to test his fate, asked Helen to go for a drive in the park with him.

At first she refused, feeling that she would prefer not to leave her mother alone; but Mrs. Seymour—with her woman's intuition—surmising Hubert's intentions, insisted that she was perfectly able to be left alone, that the change would do her a world of good, and made such a point of it that Helen finally yielded a reluctant consent.

The young man called for her about four in the afternoon, and, a cool breeze having sprung up after an exceedingly sultry day, the weary and heavy-hearted girl found herself only too eager to get away from the dusty streets and heated brick walls into the broad, cool avenues and under the beautiful trees of that lovely breathing spot of the great city.

On their way out Hubert exerted himself to make her forget her weariness and harassing troubles, and

he was repaid by seeing her gradually brighten under the influence of his genial manner and cheerful conversation.

He did not once mention the subject that lay nearest his heart during their outward trip—he knew there was a risk in what he intended to do; he wanted her to enjoy and be benefited by her ride, and could not bear the thought of seeing a cloud settle upon her fair face.

But when, after an hour's drive in the most delightful portions of the park, he turned his horse's head again toward the city, he felt that the supreme moment of his life had come.

The realization of this set his heart to beating heavily, drove all the brightness from his face, and he suddenly became grave and thoughtful, as if in a deep study.

"Of what are you thinking, Hubert?" Helen inquired, after a pause which she found becoming awkward.

She had grown into the way of addressing him by his first name of late, having followed the example of her mother, who had long since dropped the more formal "Mr. Alton."

But she regretted the question the moment after she had put it, for he turned to her with a luminous face and an eagerness of manner which told their own story but too plainly.

"I am wondering, Helen, if—if you like me any better now than you did six months ago," he said, while he searched her fair face as if hoping to find some encouragement there.

She flushed hotly beneath his look.

"Of course I like you," she said, after a moment of hesitation, but turning away from him slightly, "how could I help it when you have been so good to us during all our trouble? I should be very ungrateful,

especially after the very kind offer which you made mamma yesterday."

"Never mind that, Helen," he began, but she interrupted him, glad of any way to get away from the other dangerous subject.

"Indeed, I must mind it," she said earnestly. "I have wanted to speak of it, but did not quite know how to broach the topic, and I am sure I do not know how to thank you adequately. Why, you have been as devoted to mamma and me as an own son and brother could have been, and, believe me, I appreciate it all more than I can express."

A cloud had fallen over Hubert's face during these voluble remarks.

He was only too anxious to assume the relationship of a son toward Mrs. Seymour, but a brotherly attitude in connection with Helen would by no means be a source of satisfaction to him.

"Your mother, Helen, is certainly worthy of all that the fondest son could do for her," he gravely remarked. "I have become very deeply attached to her, and I confess I should be only too glad if she would allow me to devote myself as such to her; but, dear, I could not be satisfied to be merely a brother to you. I love you with all my heart—I want you for my wife, and I will be a kind and faithful husband to you if you will give yourself to me. Oh, my dearest, will you not? I can give you a comfortable, though not—at present—an elegant home, and I will also care for your mother as tenderly as if she were really my own. Helen, say that you will marry me—that you care for me enough to become my wife, and I shall be the happiest fellow alive."

Helen had listened with paling face and downcast eyes to her companion's passionate declaration, and with a heart that grew heavier with his every word.

She did not love him—she knew that she never

could love him, nor any other man, as she had and still loved Robert Eggleston.

His earnest avowal had recalled Rob so forcibly to her and all the fond words that he had been wont to pour into her willing ears, that she realized more than ever how her life had been blighted—how utterly hopeless and joyless her future must be if spent apart from him, and her whole soul arose in passionate revolt against the thought of marriage with any one else.

She liked Hubert—as a friend; and he had been such a kind, faithful friend to her it grieved her sorely to be obliged to give him pain by telling him that there was not the remotest possibility of his ever winning her.

She shrank from the task with keen sensitiveness, the more because she felt that if she should offend him and he should forsake them, she and her mother had not a single friend in the city upon whom to rely for aid or sympathy as they had relied upon him.

"Oh, Hubert," she cried, in a pained, almost despairing voice, "I wish that you had not said this to me."

"Why, dear?" he questioned, bending quickly to look into her face, his own growing white with a terrible fear.

"Because I can never return the affection which you express for me."

"Never?" he repeated tremulously. "That is a hard, a cruel word, Helen; but I do not believe you can realize the depth of my love for you. It is strong enough to meet, undaunted, every obstacle that may arise in my way—it is patient enough never to murmur at any condition which you may impose upon me, if I may but hope to win you at last."

"But I can give you no such hope—I can never marry you, Hubert," Helen replied, with tears in her eyes, for his words had touched her deeply.

He was silent for a moment; then he said, with great earnestness:

"My dear girl, I am going to talk to you very plainly. Of course I know just how you are situated at the present time; I know how you are struggling with adverse circumstances; how you are burdened with anxiety for your dear mother; how you yourself are working beyond your strength trying to remain in school and do the thousand and one things that have to be done in your home, and it just drives me wild to have to stand apart from you and not be able to relieve you of these burdens that are too heavy for you. You have said that you 'like' me, Helen. That liking will develop into a warmer sentiment if you will only let it—if you will only give me a chance to cultivate it. Become my wife; let me provide for your own and your mother's future, and thus relieve you both of all further anxiety regarding finances. I will send you both into the country for the summer, or as long as you care to remain, to recuperate; meantime I will be preparing a home for you here, and when you come back in the fall, strong and rosy and refreshed, I am sure that life will look brighter for all of us, and we will be very happy together. What do you say, Helen?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE BURDEN OF DECISION.

ONLY one sentence in all that he had been saying had alone made any impression upon her; but those words, "I will send you both into the country to recuperate," had made her heart leap within her with sudden hope.

She forgot herself—her sorrow, her repugnance to Hubert's proposal, everything but her mother and the joy of having her well and strong once more.

She had been almost in despair ever since the doctor had rendered his verdict; at times she felt as if she would become insane in view of loving her dear one—of having her precious life burn slowly out if she remained in the hot city during the coming summer.

But now a way of escape had come from what, until this hour, had seemed inevitable, and, for the moment, she was impelled to snatch at it eagerly, as a starving man would grasp for bread.

Oh! what a blessed boon it would seem to see that wasted, drooping form begin to rally; the color come back to her dear one's cheeks, the old light to her eyes, the elasticity to her step!

What would life be without her? She shivered as the thought came to her. Ah, she simply could not—she would not live alone.

"Well, Helen?" questioned her companion, who had been trying to possess his soul in patience during her absent-minded mood.

She came back to herself with a violent start.

Ah! but there were two sides to the question.

Could she marry a man whom she did not love, sell herself to a life of bondage—for she knew it would be that to her—even to save her mother? she asked herself with a sudden revulsion of feeling.

It would be a terrible price to pay, from her own standpoint, to say nothing of the wrong which she would do Hubert by giving him her hand when her whole nature revolted against entering into such an alliance with him.

Besides, it seemed mean to marry a man for what he could do for her in a financial way; and a sense of shame for having entertained the thought, even for a moment, suddenly dyed her face crimson.

And another, faint hope was lingering in her heart, though she hardly dared own it to herself. Rob's year was nearly up—possibly, when he returned, they might meet, the misunderstanding between them be explained, and all would be well again.

"What do I say, Hubert?" she inquired, and lifting her troubled eyes to him, "I say that I could not do it. Oh! how can you wish to marry a woman who does not love you?" she burst forth almost passionately.

"But I will win you—I will teach you to love me. Only give me the opportunity," he pleaded earnestly.

"Do you think that the heart can be taught to love in the way you wish?" Helen questioned, with a faint, sad smile.

"No, my friend," she went on gravely, "affection of that kind must be spontaneous; it cannot be forced—it is not a matter of education, and I should be lending myself to a great wrong if I should take you at your word and encourage you to hope for anything of the kind."

"Helen, do you—is it because you love any one else?" Hubert suddenly demanded, while he searched her face curiously and determined to probe matters to the bottom.

She did not reply for a moment; then, believing that an honest, straightforward answer would be the best for them both, she candidly responded:

"Yes, Hubert; I do. I may as well tell you the truth first as last, for you have been more than kind to mamma and me. I feel that I owe you my confidence to a certain extent. A long time ago I became interested in—well, I will call no names—but in some one who professed to care a great deal for me. There was no formal engagement, but it was understood that if we were both of the same mind at the end of a year the matter would be settled. But before the year was out he proved to me that his feelings had changed, and—I absolved him from all obligations, real or fancied, to me."

Helen was pale to her lips as she made the above confession, for it had opened afresh the old wound, and she suffered over again all the anguish that she had endured at the time that she had broken off her relations with Rob.

"I know to whom you refer, Helen," said Hubert, in a tone of well-assumed sympathy, although his every pulse was throbbing with jealousy and ill will toward his successful rival for the girl's affections; "as long ago as we were in school together I knew that R—he cared for you, and—and, even then, I was fearfully jealous of him."

"Hubert! can that be possible?" exclaimed Helen, both astonished and shocked that he should have been cherishing his affection for her during all those years.

"Yes, I too loved you, even then, and would have given the world, had I possessed it, to have stood in Eggleston's shoes," said Hubert, with repressed excitement and a moody frown settling on his brow. "So he has played you false, has he?" he went on passionately. "Well, I would hardly have believed it of him, for he was an all-around good fellow. I really

thought better of him than that, although he was always a trifle up-headed and high-toned, and—and it is a deuced shame, Helen, if you really cared for him,” he concluded, tenderly, and shrewdly surmising that the surest way to her heart would be to speak well of the man she loved.

“Would you mind telling me when this happened—the break, I mean?” he inquired, after a few moments of silence.

“It is several months since I discontinued my correspondence with him,” Helen replied.

“Ah! then I suppose you have not heard—you do not know that he is not coming home for another year?” the young man observed, while he searched the girl’s face curiously.

“No!” she cried, with a violent start and a terrible heart-sinking, which betrayed to herself at least how much she had been looking forward to and hoping for Rob’s return.

“Yes,” pursued Hubert, with a sense of secret exultation. “Mr. Rice, our manager, had a letter from Mr. Lancaster yesterday, and in it he wrote that he and Eggleston were about to join a party that proposes to visit Norway and Sweden, after which they would go to Egypt and the Holy Land, then proceed to China and Japan, returning by the way of the Pacific Ocean to California, and so home, after doing points of interest on the way.”

Helen could barely suppress a cry of despair in view of this unexpected delay of Rob’s home-coming, while she wondered, with a whirling brain, if Marjorie Ellsworth and her mother were included in the same party.

She realized now, as never before, how strongly she had been building upon the hope that Rob’s return would set everything right and their old relations be resumed; how she had secretly trusted that

some way would be provided to tide over the coming season until he would seek her and with open arms bid her come, and her troubles would all be ended.

But this piece of ill news swept away her last straw, and she felt that the future held only the blackness of despair for her.

What, then, remained for her? To sit listlessly down and watch the candle of her mother's life burn slowly out, then find herself utterly alone in the world in the depths of poverty?

It was true that she had some prospect of obtaining a position as teacher of art when the fall schools opened; but there were several months yet before she could secure such a situation. Meantime, what? Simply starvation and—death.

Oh! how cruel seemed life—or, rather, human existence! What a mystery from the cradle to the grave!

If she had had a single friend to whom she could have felt free to turn in this emergency, she would have smothered her pride and flown to him; but there was not one save the young man beside her, and she felt that she had no moral right to accept financial aid from him and refuse him the only boon he craved in return.

She grew faint and sick at heart as these thoughts whirled through her brain, and she realized how desperate was her condition.

Hubert was quick to perceive the struggle that was going on in her mind, and took courage from the state of things, believing that she would eventually be forced to decide in his favor.

"It will be a long trip, but a grand one," he resumed, as she did not reply to what he had told her regarding Mr. Lancaster's plans. "I'd give a great deal to have such a chance to see the world, but I'm not lucky enough to have a millionaire uncle to take

me about and foot all the bills and make me his heir when he gets through with his money. Of course I do not know the circumstances which caused you to break with Rob," he went on, with a keen side glance at Helen, as she was still silent, "but I feel sure it was no fault of yours; if it was from any snobbishness, on account of money or position, why, he is not worthy of you; if—it was because he has found some other girl whom he fancied he liked better, I would call him to account for his faithlessness mighty quick if he were here."

"Don't—please don't let us talk about it—any more," Helen pleaded faintly, and feeling as if she must go mad to have her disappointed hopes discussed so freely.

"I suppose it is really none of my business, and we'll say no more about it," Hubert returned, with a semblance of humility. "But—Helen, you see I know how things are going with you, and I just can't stand it to sit tamely by and see you wearing that despairing look, and Mrs. Seymour losing ground every day of her life. If—if you would marry me," he suddenly interposed, and trying another tack, "and give me the right to take care of you, I vow I will take the reins into my own hands—I will act upon my own responsibility, find some comfortable boarding-place, and send you both into the country until your mother gets well and strong. Something has got to be done right away."

Helen sat suddenly erect, and the color of wounded pride leaped to her forehead.

"Heavens! have we come to that, my mother and I, that we must be beholden to charity?" she cried out passionately.

"Great Scott! don't put it that way, Helen," returned the young man, almost fiercely, and he did it very well. "What I offer you is not charity. I love

you both—however you may regard me—you have opened your home and your hearts to me, a homeless, almost friendless fellow, and I am grateful enough to share my last dollar with you.”

“You are certainly very kind and generous, Hubert,” Helen murmured, her eyes full of tears, “and I wish I could make you some adequate return—I really do; but that is beyond my power.”

“I have fifty dollars here in my pocket—will you take it, Helen, and go away somewhere with your mother this very week?” he queried, and making a motion as if to draw forth his wallet.

“No, I will not,” she said sharply, the quick color blazing up again.

“Ah! I have offended you,” he cried, with a crest-fallen air; “but, believe me, I meant it all right; you will not turn me down altogether, Helen, because I have blundered?”

“Turn you down!” she repeated, in a tone of contrition and laying a trembling hand upon his arm, while her eyes now overflowed; “you are the only real friend that we have in all this great city, and we could not possibly spare you, Hubert.”

He seized her hand and clasped it closely.

“Ah! then I have gained a little corner in your heart, even if——”

He paused, as if overcome with emotion.

“You have gained more than a little corner, my friend,” said Helen, deeply moved by what she believed to be genuine feeling in him, “and by your sympathy and the noble generosity which you have manifested to-day you have won a firmer foothold in my regard than ever before.”

“Have I, truly?” he cried eagerly. “Then, Helen, I believe I could win you wholly if you would only give me leave to try. Ah! if you would but consent to marry me that would set everything right.”

Helen chilled again. Why should he perisst in going back to that wearisome topic?

"Are you sure," she asked, with a slight ring of contempt in her tones, "are you sure you could be happy, even comfortable, with a woman who does not love you, but who does love some one else?"

Hubert's lips were fiercely compressed for a moment to keep back the curse that leaped to them in his jealousy of Robert Eggleston at this outspoken confession.

His patience was well-nigh exhausted—it would perhaps have been entirely spent but for that other prize for which he was working and which he was determined to win if possible.

"Yes," he said at length, "I believe I could even meet and conquer that seemingly impossible barrier. But I will not weary you by pressing you further now. Just let me say this: I love you with my whole heart; there is nothing I would not do for you and yours, and I am willing to marry you, deeming it happiness enough to have you bear my name, to see you every day in my home, to provide you with the comforts of life, and never trouble you with avowals of affection until you voluntarily signify your willingness to listen to them. Think of this for a few days, then tell me which of my two propositions you will accept, for something must be done for your mother immediately. Meantime, I will not once mention the subject to you."

They had turned into the street where Helen lived while he was saying this, and stopped before her door as he ceased.

He assisted her to alight, bade her a cheerful good night, then re-entered the carriage and drove away, a heavy frown on his brow, a sullen fire in his eyes.

"It would be devilish luck if I should lose that ten thousand after all," he muttered, as he gave his steed

a vicious cut with the whip to ease his long pent-up anger.

As Helen went slowly up the two flights of stairs to her humble home, she was thoughtfully considering what Hubert had just been saying to her, her face grave and pale, her eyes full of pain and yearning.

"I can't do it! Oh, Rob! Rob! though you are false as false can be to me, I love you still; I shall love you forever," she moaned, great sobs heaving her chest.

But as she inserted her latchkey in the door of her suite the sound of a hard, racking cough smote upon her ears.

"Oh!" she gasped, catching her breath spasmodically, "but I must not let her—die. Is there no other way?"

She found her mother sitting up in her invalid chair, but looking waxen white and apparently exhausted by her recent fit of coughing.

"How have you been, dearest?" Helen questioned, as she bent over her and softly kissed her damp forehead.

"My cough has been rather troublesome, but it is getting cooler now, and I hope I shall have a good night," the invalid weakly returned.

"I am sorry I left you alone," said Helen, conscience-smitten, her voice full of remorse.

"You need not be—I was glad to have you go, for you needed the change, and you could not have helped anything by remaining," Mrs. Seymour returned; then asked, "did you have a pleasant drive?"

"Yes, the park is beautiful, the trees and grass so tenderly green, and the flowers and landscape effects are gorgeous. I wish you could see them for yourself," Helen replied, and trying to speak cheerfully, for she did not wish her mother to suspect how heavy of heart she was.

She then hurried away to change her dress and

prepare their evening meal, for the wan face before her suggested the need of nourishment.

But even when the meal was ready and the table spread in a most tempting manner, Mrs. Seymour had no appetite, and scarcely tasted the various viands set before her.

She retired soon afterward, but not to sleep, for Helen could hear her tossing and turning and coughing far into the small hours of the morning, which so worried and disturbed her that she found herself saying:

"I must do it—there is no other way; I will do it. I cannot let her die; oh! I cannot let her die!"

And she fell asleep just as the dawn was breaking, with those sentences ringing their fateful changes in her brain.

CHAPTER XXI.

HELEN CONSENTS.

HELEN was absent-minded and depressed all day Monday. She could not concentrate her thoughts upon her work, and her teachers, observing this, inquired if she was ill.

This aroused her for awhile, but she soon lapsed back into her former apathetic state, and was truly thankful when her duties were ended and she was at liberty to go home.

"Mamma, is there not some way that we can raise money enough to go to the Adirondacks for the summer?" she inquired, while they were partaking of their evening meal. "We own the cottage, and, having no rent to pay, we could live on very little if we could secure that little and enough to cover our traveling expenses."

"I have been thinking along the same line to-day," Mrs. Seymour responded, with a weary sigh, for she had spent many anxious hours revolving first one plan and then another that would enable her to go somewhere for health. "I suppose," she resumed, "that we might sell off our furniture here, although a forced sale would bring us but very little—it would be about like throwing everything away, and then we should have nothing to start with again if—when we came back in the fall. Then I had thought of mortgaging the cottage——"

"Why, yes; we might do that," said Helen, brightening visibly. "How strange that the plan had not oc-

curred to me? Or could you not sell that mortgage you hold?"

"I suppose I could," was the thoughtful reply, "only I should probably have to undersell and lose the accrued interest, besides. No, on the whole, I think it would be better to borrow three or four hundred dollars on the cottage, make a bold strike for the Adirondacks, store our furniture here, unless we can sub-rent, and—trust the rest."

Helen grasped eagerly at the plan, and thought, with the hopefulness of youth, that they had actually found a way out of their difficulties—felt that she was saved from the terrible sacrifice which only the night before she had almost made up her mind to make.

"Oh, I wish we had thought of this before," she said regretfully, as she searched her mother's white, wan face; "but I will go to some good broker the first thing to-morrow morning, and see what arrangements I can make."

They discussed the proposition more at length during the evening, and finally retired, feeling much more hopeful than for many days.

Instead of going to school as usual the following morning, Helen sought a broker, of whom she had heard, and, after presenting the necessary papers to prove her mother's title to the pretty cottage in the Adirondacks, stated that she wanted to raise the money as soon as possible and left the matter with him.

She waited three days, but received no word from the broker, and on Thursday afternoon sought the man again, and was deeply disappointed to learn that he had no encouragement to give her; he had laid the matter before several people, but no one seemed to care to loan money on property at such a distance; he said he hoped to be more successful in time, but

it often took weeks, sometimes months, before money could be raised in that way.

Helen's heart sank within her at this depressing information, for her mother had failed perceptibly during the last few days. But, of course, she was helpless, and went home in an almost desperate frame of mind.

What could she do? Which way turn?

Her head reeled as she retraced her steps; her skin was hot and dry; her eyes smarted and burned from the desire to weep, yet no tears would come to relieve her.

Oh, hers was a hard, cruel, bitter lot, she thought, and she could now understand how it was possible for people to become thieves for those whom they loved—sacrificing their honor for the sake of giving comfort and health to their suffering dear ones. She believed she would almost be willing to steal the money herself if she knew just where to find that she so much needed.

The startling suggestion smote her with sudden horror, and she threw out her hand with a gesture of repudiation.

Then she began to laugh nervously. What need had she to steal, when she had but to sell that hand, and with it herself, in order to provide her mother with every needed comfort!

She wondered why she was laughing. Surely either crime was a poor subject to make merry over! Then she fell to shivering as she staggered onward, and finally reached home to find Hubert with her mother, and holding for her a saucer of luscious strawberries and cream, which he had brought and prepared for her in Helen's absence.

He had been there almost every day, and never came without bringing the invalid fruits, flowers, wine, or other dainties.

He had not once referred to the subject which he had broached on Sunday; but his manner toward Mrs. Seymour plainly indicated great anxiety and that he feared the worst for her.

Friday the woman was too weak to rise or wait upon herself, and Helen was obliged to remain away from school.

Saturday she was no better, and suffered greatly, for the day was excessively warm, and when Hubert came in the evening he could see that Helen was nearly heart-broken from fear and worry. She could scarcely control her voice to greet him; her lips trembled with every word she uttered, and the look of a mortally wounded deer was in her eyes.

He had brought a box of ice-cream for Mrs. Seymour, and the eagerness with which she seized and began to devour it was pitiful to see.

"Ah, this is delicious!" she exclaimed, with a laugh that was almost childish. "How cooling—how refreshing! Helen, it makes me think of the woods behind our cottage and of that grotto by the stream there, where, even during the hottest day in summer, the water is ice-cold. You remember, dear, how we used to go every day to fill out bottles, for it seemed purer than the water at the house."

"Yes, I remember," the unhappy girl replied, but the lump in her throat almost choked her as she said it.

"Oh, how I wish I could have a drink of it this minute," Mrs. Seymour continued, yearningly, and toying with her spoon, for already the cream had begun to pall upon her capricious appetite, "and the wild strawberries must be nearly ripe in the pasture at the foot of Panther Mountain; the young winter-greens, too, must be just in their prime. Oh, Hubert, you have no idea how perfectly lovely it is up there among those grand old hills!"

She passed her plate to Helen as she concluded, the cream only partially eaten, and lay back upon her pillows with a weary sigh; and it seemed to the girl that she must scream aloud in her agony, for she knew just how her mother was yearning for the mountains, for the forest through which she loved to roam, and for the sound of that babbling brook by the grotto.

She excused herself, ostensibly to take the rejected cream into the kitchen, for she could contain herself no longer, and here Hubert found her, a little later—when Mrs. Seymour had fallen asleep—sobbing in a perfect abandonment of grief.

Helen, don't—don't!" he cried appealingly, and, bending down, he grasped her trembling hands, and stroked them tenderly. "Listen to me," he went on in a gently authoritative tone, "for I have good news for you. I have been acting without any license, but I felt justified in doing so. I used my half holiday to-day in going to Yonkers, where, on the outskirts of the town, on a thrifty farm, I had learned that board could be obtained at very reasonable rates—only six dollars a week. I obtained the refusal of nice, airy rooms for you and your mother, and, if you are pleased with the arrangements, I am to let Mrs Knight, the farmer's wife, know on Monday. Now, dear, you will let me do this for you, will you not? Cannot you see that it is very necessary?" he concluded gravely.

But Helen's answer was a wilder burst of weeping than before. The flood-gates were unlocked, and she had lost all power to control her sorely and long-tried nerves. Encouraged by the fact that she allowed her hands to lie, unresisting, in his clasp, the young man knelt upon the floor beside her, slipped his arms around her, and drew her head upon his shoulder, and held her thus until the force of her grief was spent.

And Helen, conscious that she could battle no

longer against her fate, rested there within his embrace without repulsing him, and feeling as if he were the only friend and support she had in the world.

At last, she lifted her head, and wiped the tears from her cheeks.

"How good you are to us, Hubert!" she said gratefully; "how thoughtful it was of you to go to Yonkers to-day upon such an errand! Truly, you are a friend in need!"

"And you will go, Helen?" he cried eagerly. "You will let me telegraph Mrs. Knight that she may make ready for you?"

Helen flushed hotly. He had said nothing about expecting any return for what he was doing for her, and she could not bring herself to open a discussion upon the subject. The thought of accepting as charity what he had suggested, even though so kindly offered, was none the less obnoxious to her.

There was, plainly, but one course for her to pursue, and that was to regard it in the light of a loan. Yet how was it ever to be paid? She shivered slightly as she gently released herself from his still clinging arms.

"Six dollars!" she said reflectively. "That would be twelve dollars a week, and we may have to stay very late in the season; besides, there will be incidentals, and the expense of breaking up here and storing our goods. Hubert, I am sure, I do not know as we could ever pay the money back; it seems like a great undertaking to me, and yet I can see, as you say, that the change is absolutely necessary."

"Don't think of it as a debt, dear," said the young man, flushing. "I never want you to pay the money back, Helen. I want no compensation, unless——"

She lifted an inquiring glance to him, but well she knew what he was about to say.

"Unless you will pay me in the way I have already

suggested—by giving me the right to care for you always,” he pleaded earnestly.

Her eyes drooped. She had reached that point where she did not care much what became of her; she was ready to sacrifice everything in the world if she could only see her mother well again.

“You know what I have told you, Hubert; could you marry me under such circumstances?” she questioned in a scarcely audible voice.

“I have answered those objections already,” he replied in a repressed tone; then he burst forth passionately: “Oh, Helen, if you will give yourself to me, I shall be the happiest fellow alive! You shall never regret it; I will spare nothing to make your life as perfect and complete as you can desire. Will you—oh, will you be my wife?”

She had grown deathly white while he was speaking, for already she felt ashamed and degraded, as if she were bartering herself, and yet she had made up her mind that she could not accept her own and her mother's support from him without making him some adequate return.

“There is no other way,” she sighed, the doubtful acquiescence leaping involuntarily from her lips; “and, if you choose to take me under existing conditions, I—I will be as faithful to you as I know how to be.”

Hubert Alton was in a secret transport of joy.

He had won at last! The battle had been a long and harassing struggle, and the victory was but a sorry one, at best, since he could not fail to understand that Helen was simply making a vicarious offering of herself; that poverty and despair had absolutely driven her to his protection.

But, in his avarice and selfishness, these circumstances seemed, for the moment, of minor importance.

He loved Helen, if she did not love him; she would become his wife, and he would be very proud of her,

for she was beautiful and talented, and—the ten thousand dollars, which seemed a fortune to him, would also become his.

These ends attained, the future would take care of itself, or, at least, so he hopefully reasoned.

“If I ‘choose to take you, Helen,’” he whispered, unable to speak aloud from the intensity of his emotions, and again drawing her into his arms. “Of course I shall choose, and feel blessed beyond expression in so doing. My darling, I am happier at this moment than I ever dared to expect to be, and I will be so faithful and devoted to you that I will compel your truant affections to turn to me. Now, dear, when may I claim my bride?” he concluded, in a voice that was tremulous with repressed triumph as he waited for her answer.

“Whenever—you like,” she murmured faintly, and becoming almost unconscious, in view of the step that she had taken, and which now seemed irrevocable.

“Then, of course, the sooner the better,” Hubert observed; “for we must get our mother—she will henceforth be really mine, as well as yours—out of this hot city with all possible despatch.”

“Yes—yes,” said Helen, with eager impetuosity. “Oh, if she could only go to-morrow!”

“I doubt if Mrs. Knight could get ready for you so soon as that,” said the young man thoughtfully; “but I think it could be arranged by Tuesday, if she should be strong enough then for the journey. And would you be willing to be married on Tuesday?” he concluded, with some trepidation.

“Yes, if you like.”

A flush of exultation swept over his face at her ready response.

“I think I can get leave of absence for the day, in view of the importance of the occasion,” he said. “We will be married at noon, and take the afternoon train

for Yonkers, only it will be a trial to have to leave you there; but I shall come to you again on Saturday."

He bent, as if to kiss the pale face that rested against his shoulder; but something in its frozen look deterred him, and he simply lifted one hand, and tenderly smoothed back a few stray locks that had fallen over her forehead.

He then began to talk of the arrangements that would be necessary to make for the coming change, and Helen aroused herself to discuss them with him, and they decided not to disturb the suite before leaving it, lest the confusion and excitement should make Mrs. Seymour worse.

After they were nicely settled in the country, Helen said, she would come in town some day, and together they could pack and store the furniture, until it should be wanted again in the fall.

The marriage, too, must be very quiet, in their little parlor, with no one present save the clergyman and her mother, after which they would drive directly to the station, and get their dear invalid into the pure air of the country before nightfall.

CHAPTER XXII.

FRILLS AND FURBELOWS.

THUS, so far as Helen was concerned, the die was cast. She had pledged her hand without her heart, and consented to become Hubert Alton's wife.

When they returned to the parlor, after having completed their arrangements, they found Mrs. Seymour awake, and apparently much refreshed after her nap, whereupon Hubert gently told her that he had won Helen's consent to marry him, and asked her sanction to their union.

Had not the sick woman been so weak, both in body and mind, she could not have failed to observe that it was only by the most heroic efforts that Helen managed to maintain her self-possession during this ordeal; that the hunted look in her lovely eyes betrayed a broken heart, while, at the same time, the firm, settled lines about her sweet mouth betokened a vicarious offering for the life of another.

But Mrs. Seymour appeared to be greatly pleased with the arrangement, and accepted it in a rather matter-of-fact way, which seemed to indicate that the decision was not wholly a surprise to her.

She brightened visibly while they were telling her of their plans, but vetoed decidedly their trying to get away by Tuesday.

"I shall not be strong enough," she said; "and we cannot do things in such a hurry."

"But, mamma, we made our plans for your sake; every day in this hot city is wilting you more and more," Helen argued.

"Well, but, have you noticed, the wind has changed during the last hour, and I believe the next few days will be cooler; we have not yet had our long May storm, late though it is; and, if it will only come now, I shall do well enough," Mrs. Seymour persisted. Then she added: "There are many things that must be carefully packed away, if we are going to be gone all summer; and, though I know Helen would do her best, yet I should feel better to have them done under my supervision. I think we will not try to get away before Saturday."

And she would not hear a word of objection, and Helen began to feel quite tried with her, after all her anxiety, and the sacrifice she had made on her account.

"No," she said brightly in reply to the arguments of the young people; "now that I have the prospect of the country before me, I have hope—hope means life, and already, with this cool, fresh breeze coming from the sea, I begin to feel stronger."

And so it was decided that the marriage should be delayed until Saturday noon, and Mrs. Knight was to be informed accordingly.

Hubert was disappointed, for he was eager to have the fetters riveted; he wanted to be sure of his bride and the ten thousand dollars.

However, he felt obliged to acquiesce in Mrs. Seymour's decision, and said that he would attend to all outside arrangements, and neither Helen nor her mother need feel any responsibility concerning them.

But, after he was gone, Mrs. Seymour grew silent and thoughtful, and, when Helen had helped her to bed, and was about to take leave of her for the night, she put her arms around the girl's neck, and drew her down to her.

"My darling, are you sure that you are doing what is wisest and best? Do you want to marry Hubert?" she questioned earnestly.

"Yes, mamma, I am very sure," Helen said steadily, and replying to her first query, while she bent and fondly kissed the grave face on the pillow.

"Isn't the decision very sudden?"

"No, dear; we—talked the matter over a long time ago, but—we did not seem to be able to come to any definite decision until to-night," Helen replied, with a forced cheerfulness which wholly belied the heaviness of her heart.

Her mother appeared to be satisfied, however, for, like a tired child, she turned, with a long sigh of relief, upon her pillow, and almost immediately fell asleep.

She slept peacefully and restfully the whole night through, and appeared much refreshed and stronger in the morning, a circumstance which she attributed to the cool, easterly breeze that was sweeping in from the ocean.

Helen had decided that school must be given up entirely, and so, on Monday morning, sent a note to the principal, stating that, owing to her mother's precarious condition, and a consequent flitting into the country, she would be obliged to discontinue her attendance for the remainder of the year.

This done, she set herself bravely and busily at work preparing for the change before her, a change she so dreaded, yet was determined to make.

Mrs. Seymour continued to rally, for, as she had predicted, the weather continued to be cool. They had no severe storm, although there were several cloudy days, with occasionally a dash of rain; and the woman, greatly encouraged, entered into Helen's plans with all the zest which should have been shown, but was not, in this case, by the bride-elect herself.

"Helen, you must be married in white," she observed, on Tuesday morning, while they were putting away winter clothing, and looking over summer ap-

parel. "I could not think of having you wear anything else."

Poor Helen had not given a thought to what she should wear upon the occasion referred to—scarcely to the ceremony itself that must precede their flitting. In fact, her chief aim had been to forget all about it; to fill her time so full of work that she could not dwell upon the approaching sacrifice.

"Oh, dearest, it will not matter what I wear," she indifferently replied, although she had paled at the suggestion; "everything will be done so quietly, you know, and there will be no one here, save ourselves, to see what I have on. Besides, I have neither time, money, nor inclination to spend upon the preparation of wedding attire," she concluded, a spasm of pain contracting her lips.

"I know the time is limited, money we have none, and you surely do not seem very enthusiastic; but, all the same, I will not have you married in any somber color," Mrs. Seymour persisted, a shade of uneasiness stealing over her face in view of Helen's apathy. "There is that white serge that I was working upon before I had that last pull-back," she resumed; "the skirt is all finished but putting it into the binding, and the jacket needs only the collar and facings. I can easily do that; I am so much better this week."

Helen at first flatly refused to allow her to take a stitch for her; but, when she saw how her heart was set upon it, how disappointed she was going to be if she was not married in white, she quietly yielded the point, and gave her leave to work, a little while at a time, upon the dress.

Meantime, Hubert was jubilant, and could scarce contain himself for joy.

On leaving Helen, after having secured her promise to marry him, he had hurried to a cable office, and sent the following message to Mr. Lancaster, at Paris:

"Miss Helen Seymour will become my wife at twelve o'clock on Saturday, June 1. HUBERT ALTON."

On Wednesday morning following, Hubert received this reply:

"Congratulations. Have cabled Rice to deposit in First National Bank, subject to your order, stipulated sum, upon presentation of marriage license.

"H. LANCASTER."

Of course, Hubert was even more elated upon the receipt of the message, and he could scarcely wait for the moment to arrive when his hopes would be consummated and that long-coveted little fortune safely in his possession.

That same morning, he confided to Mr. Rice that he was to be married Saturday, and begged that he might have the entire day, promising to work extra hours afterward to make up the lost time. He also displayed the marriage license, which he had already obtained.

Mr. Rice readily granted him the favor, and unconditionally, remarking at the same time that he had received a message from Mr. Lancaster, and should be happy to carry out his instruction; the money would be deposited before the week expired, and he could draw upon it at his convenience.

"You are a lucky fellow, Alton," he smilingly added, "to have so won your employer's favor as to prompt him to make you a wedding present like that."

Half-an-hour later, he also handed the young man a liberal check, and requested him to expend it according to his best judgment for his bride-elect, and also present to Miss Seymour his best wishes for her future happiness.

Hubert had already sent word to Mrs. Knight, at

Yonkers, to make ready for her guests, who would arrive on the afternoon train, if Mrs. Seymour should be able to make the journey.

Every evening found him at the little suite in —— Street, where he made himself helpful, as usual, and by Friday night all trunks were packed, and everything was in readiness for the important event and fitting of the morrow.

Mrs. Seymour had completed the pretty white serge; and this material being very much in favor for outing suits at that season, the dress would not be in the least objectionably conspicuous on their trip, and, with a jaunty sailor hat of straw, banded with a heavy white ribbon, consoled the fond woman, in a measure, for the disappointment of not being able to give her beautiful daughter a more elaborate wedding outfit.

Helen had worked more and more diligently as the days slipped by; she dare not give herself time to think, lest her heart fail her before the fatal hour appointed for the forging of her fetters.

She lost flesh perceptibly, and, when she arose on Saturday morning, she looked more like a spirit than a being of flesh-and-blood.

But she assumed a cheerful air and look, for her mother's sake, and bustled around with even more than her accustomed energy, for there were many last things to be done.

One trunk had been left open for a few things that could not be packed the night previous, and this must be made ready to go with the others when the expressman came. She had her mother and herself to dress for the ceremony, and their journey, and lunch to prepare.

Hubert was not to come until nearly twelve, when he would bring the clergyman with him; but he sent a pleasant reminder of himself about nine o'clock, in

the shape of a great box of exquisite flowers, to be used as decorations.

When the house was in order, and Helen had completed her mother's toilet, she made the weary woman get into her reclining chair, which she had drawn into the little parlor, and admonished her to rest.

Then she repaired to her own chamber, to don the simple white serge that had been prepared for her bridal.

She had hardly buttoned the beautifully fitting jacket, and fastened a dainty lace jabot at her throat, when she was startled by the ringing of the door-bell.

She glanced at the little clock on her dressing-case.

It was a few minutes after eleven, and not time yet for Hubert to come.

"Who can it be?" she said to herself. "Oh, the expressman, perhaps!"

She ran to the speaking-tube in the hall.

"Who is it, please?" she inquired.

"Are you Miss Helen Seymour?" questioned a woman's voice from below.

"Yes."

"Can I see you for a few moments?"

Helen thought a moment, then returned:

"I am about leaving town; I am very busy, and must ask to be excused."

"But please, Miss Seymour; I will not detain you long, and I have a matter of great importance to speak to you about," pleaded the person at the other end of the tube.

Again Helen hesitated. She recoiled from meeting a stranger just then; but Hubert would not come for nearly three-quarters of an hour, she had nothing to do, and she would have to spend all that time thinking, if she remained alone, so she responded:

"Very well; I will see you for a few moments," and

pressed the button that controlled the lower door as she spoke.

She then opened the door of her suite, and stood waiting for the appearance of the stranger, listening wonderingly to the faltering steps that seemed to climb the two flights of stairs with difficulty.

Presently, there appeared upon the landing a pale, slim girl, who could not have been more than eighteen or nineteen years of age. Her sweet, sad face was crowned with a mass of waving, golden hair, and in her arms she bore a sleeping babe of, perhaps, five months.

"May I come in?" she inquired appealingly, and glancing meekly into Helen's wondering face.

"Yes," she said, after glancing into the parlor, and seeing that her mother, worn out with the excitement of the morning, was sound asleep, "and, if you will not mind, I will take you into my room, where we shall not disturb my mother, who is ill."

"No, I do not mind; anywhere will do," said the girl, with a weary sigh.

Helen softly closed the door, and led the way to her chamber, which was almost at the other end of the hall.

"Put the baby on the bed," she said kindly, as she also noiselessly closed the second door; "you seem very tired after coming up all those stairs."

"Thank you," said the young mother gratefully, and gently deposited the little one upon the couch.

Then she sank weakly upon a chair beside it.

"Miss Seymour, you must forgive me for coming to you this morning," she began, flushing to her brows, while she searched Helen's face with anxious eyes. "I knew you were to be married to-day, but——"

"You knew! How did you know?" exclaimed Helen in astonishment. "Who are you, please? You did not tell me."

Again the girl flushed, and her head drooped like a wilted flower.

"My name is Mary Wadleigh," she said in a scarcely audible voice.

"Ah, Mrs. Wadleigh," Helen began, not liking to address her too familiarly, while she glanced from her to the tiny figure upon the bed, and thought how young she seemed to have such a responsibility.

"No," interposed her companion, with a despairing gesture, while the bright head sank still lower; "I am not married; I——"

"Oh!" gasped Helen, appalled; "forgive me; I thought, of course——"

"Yes; and you had a right to," sobbed the young stranger, as she paused, feeling she was making a bad matter worse; "and—and—I am so wretched! That is why I have dared to come to you to-day. I thought, perhaps, you were really as lovely and kind as you look, and you—might be willing to—to help me."

"I help you? What can I do for you?" queried Helen, in perplexity. "I am afraid I cannot," she went on hastily, a great pity welling up in her heart for the unfortunate girl; "I have no money. Mamma and I have lost all we had, and I go away this afternoon into the country with my mother, who, as I have told you, is very ill. But how did you happen to come to me? How did you know that I am to be married to-day?"

"I found it out from a—a letter."

"A letter!" exclaimed her listener, more and more amazed. "To whom was the letter written?"

The girl shivered.

"To—to the father of my baby," she moaned, in a voice of anguish.

"And—who is he?" demanded Helen, and beginning to thrill from head to foot.

"Oh, forgive me, Miss Seymour," Mary Wadleigh

returned, as she lifted her heavy, tear-stained eyes appealingly to her companion. "I know that you will hate me when I tell you—but I must! I must!—he is Hubert Alton!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

MARY WADLEIGH'S STORY.

"Oh, heavens!" panted Helen, and sank strengthless upon the bed, near which she had been standing.

For two or three minutes there was not a sound in the room.

Mary Wadleigh sat with bowed head, her face covered with her hands, while Helen looked like one who had been suddenly turned into a statue frozen with horror.

At length, however, she broke the spell and sat erect, as if imbued with new life and energy; for, notwithstanding the terrible revelation and all that it involved, she felt as if a crushing burden had all at once rolled off her heart.

She was free! Oh, she was free! She need not bow her neck to the yoke of bondage which she had so feared and dreaded. She saw now with clearer vision, and knew that she had no right to do evil that good might come.

For an instant her heart quailed as she thought of her mother, and the terrible disappointment awaiting her; the next she arose above it, telling herself that God would provide a way of escape from future ills, even as He had saved her from this pitfall into which she had been about to plunge headlong.

She reached out her hand and laid it gently upon the shoulder of the stricken girl beside her.

"You poor child!" she said, in tones replete with tender sympathy, "no, indeed, I do not 'hate' you for what you have told me. I am glad that you came to

me—so glad! And I will help you—I will do anything in my power to lighten your burden,” and she glanced sadly at the sleeping child as she concluded.

Mary looked up at her, an expression of mingled wonder and reverence in her sad blue eyes.

She lifted the hand that rested on her shoulder and kissed it softly.

“How good you are! How lovely you are to me! I—I was sure you would—spurn me,” she murmured, with a choking sob.

“Why should I, dear?” questioned Helen, with starting tears. “I believe you have come in time to save me from committing an even greater wrong. But, tell me all about your trouble, Mary—for, of course, I must hear the whole story now.”

“I will not take more time than I can help,” the girl began, glancing at the clock, when Helen quietly interposed, saying:

“Take all the time you need. I want to know everything, and—there will be no wedding here to-day.”

Mary started violently, and searched the grave, beautiful face beside her with eager eyes.

“Truly?” she questioned joyously. “You will not marry Hubert?”

“Most assuredly not,” was the decided, almost stern, response.

“Oh, Miss Seymour!” exclaimed the grateful girl, “what a load you have lifted from my heart! What can I say? How can I thank you?”

Helen’s lips curled ever so slightly as she realized from what she had been saved—how grateful she was for her own escape. But she only remarked in a friendly tone:

“I am glad if you are comforted. Now let me hear your story—at least, all that you wish to tell me.”

“Well, I was born and always lived in —, a suburb of Boston,” Mary resumed. “My father is a

wholesale druggist in that city. I had a good mother and was carefully reared, but she died when I was fourteen years old, and after that we children—I have two younger brothers—were left to the care of a housekeeper. Two years ago this month I graduated from the high school in the town where we lived. About that time I first met Hubert Alton, who lived with his uncle, in the same place. He was a clerk in his office and went to his business in Boston every day. We liked each other from the first; he paid me a great deal of attention, took me to various places of amusement, the dancing-school in the winter—in fact, we were almost always together when we could be. When my father found it out he was greatly displeased—he did not like Hubert for some reason, and forbade me to receive him at home or go anywhere with him. But I had grown to care so much for him that I was willing to do almost anything to see him, and used to meet him in secret. We were engaged for a long time, Hubert promising to marry me just as soon as his uncle would pay him sufficient salary to warrant such a step. But Mr. Alton failed, and Hubert was thrown out of a position. He said that he would come to New York, where he felt sure he could get another situation, and would send for me just as soon as he could get well established. I never heard from him after he left Boston, although I wrote him many times, sending my letters to the general delivery, as he had told me to do.

“Weeks passed, and—and I began to get frightened. Then I grew desperate and ran away from home, leaving no word of explanation, and came straight here, vowing that I would search the city over to find the man who had so cruelly deserted me. But, for a long time I could get no trace of him; then one afternoon—it was last September, on Labor Day—I accidentally ran against him in an elevated station, where you and

he, with another lady, were waiting to take the train——”

“Oh!” interposed Helen in surprise. “I remember, now, hearing mamma asking Mr.—Mr. Alton about some girl whom she saw talking with him. And that was you?”

“Yes; but he would not have much to say to me. He seemed to be afraid that you would see him talking to me; he promised, though, to come to see me later, and asked for my address.

“But, somehow, I did not trust him, and I followed him all the way home with you. I heard him call you ‘Helen,’ and the other lady ‘Mrs. Seymour,’ and I afterward found the name Seymour over the speaking-tube of suite two in the house I saw you enter. I was determined to find out who you were, for, if Hubert did not come to see me, as he had promised, I should have come to you to get his address. But he did come, the very next evening, and we had a terrible time. He was fearfully angry at me for following him here to New York, and he flatly refused to—to marry me, in spite of—of all.”

The girl broke down, and sobbed in a heart-broken way at this point; but, after a moment or two, she resumed:

“I vowed to him that I would never go back home, and after a desperate quarrel—for he saw that I meant every word I said—he finally agreed to pay my board with a poor woman whom he knew, and—I have been with her ever since. He came to see me occasionally, and was quite kind to me for awhile after—baby came. He would spend an evening with me now and then, but he got glum and cross, would not talk with me, and often went to sleep on the lounge in the room. One night, two or three months ago, while he was sleeping, I espied a letter sticking out of a pocket in his overcoat. His treatment of me

had made me suspicious, and I stole it. After he had gone, I read it, and found that I had a right to be suspicious. Here it is—you may read it,” and she drew it from her pocket, and held it out to her companion.

But Helen flushed hotly, and shrank away from it.

“I—I do not like to read other people’s letters,” she said, with a touch of hauteur.

“But you may—you ought; it concerns you,” persisted the girl earnestly.

Without further objection, Helen took the envelope, observing as she did so that it bore a foreign postmark, and drew forth the missive.

It was dated from Paris, France, and read thus:

“DEAR ALTON: I was glad to hear from you regarding the progress of the little matter which we discussed before I left New York. You say that no date has as yet been set, but I sincerely hope that you may be able to bring about the alliance before our return. Will give you an extension of time, as I have concluded to join a party going to Norway and Sweden, thence to Egypt and the Holy Land, pushing on to China and Japan, then across the Pacific to California, and so home, taking in all points of interest on our way. I shall await, with some anxiety, further intelligence from you; and, when the affair is settled, you shall receive the promised reward. Very truly yours,
H. LANCASTER.”

Helen was deathly white when she finished reading the above, and her hand trembled visibly as she returned the letter to its envelope.

Her brain was in a perfect whirl. She remembered Hubert telling her of Mr. Lancaster’s plans for the coming year, but he had said, or implied, that the news had come through Mr. Rice, the manager of the

firm, while he himself had been in direct correspondence with the man, and it was patent to her that the subject-matter of the letter which she had just read could refer to no one but herself. Helen sank into a chair to ponder.

She began to realize that there had been a deliberate plot to separate her from Rob, and that, perhaps, he had not been in the least to blame for the misunderstanding that had arisen between them. Possibly, he might have been made to believe that she was untrue to him—that Hubert Alton had superseded him in her affections, and she was going to marry him.

She was appalled at this view of affairs, and reproached herself bitterly for the cool, blind, and summary way in which she had written him, breaking with him.

“And that is not all, either,” said Mary Wadleigh, suddenly breaking in upon her reverie. “Of course, I was wild after reading that letter, but I kept it to myself, for I meant to come to you—of course, I knew the man referred to you—and tell you everything. Hubert missed it, and was in a great state of mind for awhile, but he did not appear to suspect me of having it. I went to the house where you used to live to find you, but you had moved, and then I was nearly distracted, for fear you would be married before I could discover you. I have had a long search, and it was not until last night that I was successful in locating you. Hubert had not been to see me for a long time, and last evening, about supper-time, determined to see him, I went to his boarding-place, although he had forbidden me ever to seek him there. His landlady told me that he had not come in. I said that he owed me money for laundry work and mending—I needed it, and would wait. He came, a few moments later, and I could see that he was terribly upset to find me there, although he tried to

conceal the fact. He remarked—for his landlady's benefit, I expect—that he had not the exact change by him, but, if I would step up-stairs, he would give it to me. But he berated me soundly when we were alone, and threatened to throw me over entirely if I came spying about his boarding-place. He said that he was going away to-morrow for awhile, and I was not to expect him to come to see me again at present. I tried to make him tell me where he was going, and how long he would be absent, but he evaded me, and acted so strangely that it instantly flashed upon me that he was going to be married. I informed him that I must have some money, for I was almost out, and he went to his desk to get me some. As he unlocked it, a scrap of paper slipped out and fell to the floor, though he did not see it. It looked like a telegram, and, my curiosity being aroused, I made up my mind I would have it. I walked across the room, and stood beside him while he was counting out the money for me, and put my foot on the paper. While he was re-locking the desk, I dropped my handkerchief, and, when I stooped to recover it, I picked up the paper with it.

“On leaving the house, I took it to the nearest light—it was a telegram, sure enough—and read it. Here it is—it is a sequel to the letter.”

She drew forth another envelope, and passed it to Helen, who now had no scruples against availing herself of its contents.

A low cry of mingled indignation and dismay escaped her as she read those few words transmitted by Mr. Lancaster to Hubert Alton:

“Congratulations. Have cabled Rice to deposit in First National Bank, subject to your order, sum stipulated, upon presentation of marriage license.

“H. LANCASTER.”

"So he was bribed to marry me!" she murmured, with white, compressed lips.

"It looks like it," her companion replied, adding: "Of course I don't understand all that the man means in either the letter or telegram, but I could see that there was some queer plot in the affair that made Hubert so anxious to shake me and marry some one else, and that some one I surmised to be you, so I was determined to get at the bottom of the matter as soon as possible. I waited around in the street until Hubert came out, for I imagined he might go to see you; then I followed him here. I meant to see you last night, but he stayed so late I did not dare leave baby any longer, so, after I had waited about an hour, I went home. You can, perhaps, imagine what a night I spent, for I put this and that together, and felt almost certain that Hubert was intending to marry you to-day, so I ventured upon this bold step—to come to you, tell you all the truth, and beg you to help me make Hubert, if possible, do what is only just and right.

"Oh, Miss Seymour!" she broke forth, after a slight pause, and lifting her streaming eyes to Helen, and holding out her clasped hands in supplication to her; "in spite of the appearances against me, I am not a wicked girl. I have made a mistake—a terrible mistake—but I loved him with all my heart. I love him still, notwithstanding his cruelty to me, and I trusted his promises. I would not willingly do a wrong or dishonorable act—I want to redeem myself, live an upright, respectable life, and rear my baby to be what any loving mother would wish her child to become."

"I am sure you do—I believe you," said Helen gently, and deeply moved by her suffering and the harrowing story to which she had listened.

"I really believed that Bert truly loved me, and meant to do right, before he came back to New York,

and that man bribed him to marry you, for some reason that I cannot understand," Mary resumed, comforted by Helen's kindness, "and, if he would marry me, even now, I am sure that we might be happy together, and I would be a true and faithful wife to him. Miss Seymour, will you use your influence for me? Will you help me? And I will bless you as long as I live!"

Tears rushed to Helen's eyes as she listened to this earnest plea. Her heart was filled with pity and sympathy for this fair young girl, who had so long been motherless, and was now adrift on the cruel world—whose condition was so much worse than her own, in spite of her poverty, and the fact that, when this was over, she would not know which way to turn to provide for her own mother's necessities.

Strange as it may seem, too, she did not blame Hubert so severely as she might have done, in connection with the part that he had played in the drama with herself, had she not realized what a monstrous plot had been behind it all.

She felt sure that he must have been terribly tempted; he had, doubtless, been very heavily bribed by Mr. Lancaster to effect a marriage with her, if possible, and she believed that the man had planned this solely to separate her from Rob, who, perhaps, had been as completely deceived and victimized as herself.

"Oh! and he has always believed his uncle to be such a model of all that was high-minded and noble!" she said to herself, while she was filled with contempt beyond expression for one who could have stooped so low to accomplish his ends, and destroy the happiness of two loving hearts.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HELEN AND HER MOTHER.

"YES, Mary, I will help you—I will befriend you all that lies within my power. I will do my utmost toward righting the wrong that has been done you," Helen replied, with a heartiness which showed that she was making no light promise.

"How good you are!" cried the grateful girl, her tears streaming afresh. "Oh, I hope your heart will not be broken—your life spoiled—by giving up Hubert to me! Do—do you love him so very much?"

Helen smiled wearily at the question.

If Mary could have known, she thought, what a revulsion of feeling had swept over her upon learning her sad story, how glad she was to be released from the uncongenial union that had been so nearly consummated, what an escape she regarded it, she would not have imagined that she was making very much of a sacrifice for her.

Nevertheless, if she had loved him with all her heart, her decision would have been the same; she never could have married him, after learning of the wrong of which he had been guilty.

And yet her very last support seemed to have been wrenched from beneath her by this unlooked-for change in her plans. However, she would not allow herself to dwell upon that feature at that time; she must settle with Hubert first, then face her own future with what courage she could.

"No, Mary," she returned, "my 'heart will not be broken,' nor my 'life spoiled,' and I am going to tell

you just the truth about the matter, so that your mind may be set at rest upon that point. My mother has been very ill for a long time, and, besides, during the last year we have lost all the property we had. Through all our trouble, Hubert Alton has been very kind to us—like a devoted son and brother. I do not know just how far he may have been influenced in this by the plot which the letter and telegram have revealed and his love of money. He has professed to want to marry me for a long time, but now I can see that he and Mr. Lancaster had planned it all out before he ever spoke of marriage to me. I imagine he must have been heavily bribed, for the man is said to be very rich, and, of course, I can understand, it must have been a great temptation to him; and yet, he has been so good to us—so helpful and faithful, I cannot believe him wholly depraved, in spite of his great and deliberate wrong against you. I do not love—I never have loved—Hubert as a wife should love her husband, and, knowing this, I rejected his proposals until almost our last dollar was gone—until a week ago this morning, when he insisted that something decisive must be done for my mother, who seemed to be failing every hour, and, the doctor having said that she would surely die if she remained in the city, we—arranged that we would be—married to-day, and go immediately into the country——”

“Oh! And you cannot go now?” exclaimed Mary in a tone of dismay; “must you give it up, if—if you do not marry Hubert?”

Helen's face grew very white and sad as she replied:

“I—I do not know; but we will not talk of that now, I believe that God will take care of us in His own way, and we shall have to leave all to Him.”

She had scarcely uttered the words when a wave of peace and trust seemed to sweep over her troubled heart and leave behind it “a great calm.”

"Now you will understand," she resumed, after a moment, "why my 'heart will neither be broken' nor my 'life spoiled.' I know that I never should have consented to marry Hubert, and I believe you were sent to save me from a future of great unhappiness."

"Thank you—oh, thank you, Miss Seymour! You have comforted me more than I can tell you," said her companion, breathing a long sigh of relief.

"Now, I am going to ask you to let me keep both this letter and the telegram," Helen went on, glancing at the papers, which she had laid upon the bed; "they certainly concern me more than any one else, and there may come a time when I shall need them to prove that I have been true; for—Mary, a terrible wrong has been done me, also. That man—Mr. Lancaster—has plotted this to separate me from some one for whom I do care a great deal."

"Oh, Miss Seymour! Is that so?" cried Mary, her face lighting suddenly, for the confession proved to her beyond a doubt that Helen did not love Hubert, and that she really would enter heartily into the plan of trying to influence him to do right by her.

"Yes; but, of course, you understand, I tell you this in confidence. I do not wish you to speak of it to any one—I simply wanted you to know just where I stand."

"I will never betray your confidence, Miss Seymour," said the girl gravely; "and I thank you for it. You shall have the letter and telegram—I am very glad to give them to you," she concluded, as she pushed them toward Helen, who gathered them up, and, crossing the room, locked them within her desk.

"Now, I shall have to ask you to excuse me for a few moments," she observed, as she turned back to her guest; "I want to see if mamma is awake, and, if so, prepare her for—the change in our plans."

"Perhaps I had better go now," said Mary, starting

to her feet and searching Helen's pale face with sympathetic eyes.

"No, indeed; I wish you to remain here," Helen gravely returned. "I have a special reason; the baby is still asleep, and comfortable, and, I am sure, you have nothing important to call you away."

"No, except that I have to find cheaper lodgings, for Hubert told me last night that he could not let me have as much money hereafter as he had been giving me," said the girl, a look of anxiety sweeping over her face.

Helen's lips curled, and she flushed crimson at the information.

She felt ashamed and degraded, in view of the fact that she had ever consented to profit by money which rightly belonged to this poor girl and her child. She was profoundly grateful to her for having come to her before it was too late to rectify what would have been a lifelong mistake.

"Well," she said kindly, "you need not look for lodgings to-day; you shall remain here, and be my guest until Monday, for I want to see if some permanent and more desirable arrangement cannot be made for you."

"How can I ever thank you for being so good to me?" sobbed Mary in a transport of gratitude. "I did not expect you would be so kind—I did not look for anything like this; most young ladies would have taunted me with—with my sorrow, and felt that they were polluted by my presence."

"You poor child! Truly, I have only the tenderest sympathy for you," said Helen, laying a gentle hand upon her shoulder, "and I feel that you are not half so guilty of the wrong that has been done this dear little one as the man who has refused to bestow a father's care and protection upon it. What a pretty baby she is!" she added, bending over the small

sleeper, and caressingly touching the rings of brown hair that encircled its forehead; "what have you named her?"

"Oh, Miss Seymour, I haven't had the heart to give her a name yet; she is simply 'baby' to me until—until I can be sure what her future is to be," the young mother responded, with trembling lips, but with a world of love in her sad eyes that rested upon the pretty pink-and-white face.

"Well, take off your hat, dear; you shall stay with us for a day or two; and now I must go to my mother," Helen hastily observed, as, glancing at the clock, she saw that it was twenty minutes to twelve, and knew that Hubert and the clergyman would soon make their appearance.

She hurriedly left the room, and hastened to the parlor, where she found Mrs. Seymour still sleeping.

Going to her side, she laid her hand softly against her cheek.

The woman stirred, and smiled, even before she unclosed her eyes, for she instantly recognized the familiar touch.

"Why, I have been asleep, haven't I?" she exclaimed in surprise. "Have they come? Is it time? Oh, how pretty you look, Helen, in this white serge! It is very becoming to you, and fits you nicely."

She sat erect, and seemed to be greatly refreshed by her nap, while her glance roved, with fond admiration, over the white-clad graceful figure by her side, and without appearing to observe Helen's unusual gravity and the look of high resolve on her pale face.

"No, dearest, they have not yet come yet; it lacks a quarter of an hour of being twelve," Helen calmly replied, although her heart was beating heavily with dread, in view of what she had to tell her mother. "And, mamma," she went on, kneeling beside her, and slipping her arms around her neck, "would it be such

a very great disappointment to you if—if we could not go into the country to-day?"

"Why, Helen, what do you mean?" exclaimed the woman in a startled tone, and suddenly becoming conscious that something had gone wrong. "How pale you are—how strangely your voice sounds! Has anything happened?"

"Do not be alarmed, mamma, dear," was the fond response; "I have some news for you; but, in spite of the disappointing fact that we shall have to postpone our trip to Yonkers for awhile, I believe it is good news—at least, for me. Now, listen, and please do not interrupt, for I must tell you everything before Hubert comes."

Then, with her arms still enfolding her, she related, as briefly as possible, Mary Wadleigh's pathetic story, but did not mention either the letter or telegram.

Somehow, she shrank from mentioning Halburton Lancaster's name before her mother, and from allowing her to know of this additional wrong that had been perpetrated against her and her child by the man who, years ago, had so wronged her.

She merely stated, in a casual way, to account for the girl's presence, that she had found out, in some way, Hubert's intentions, and so had come there to plead her cause.

"Why, why, Helen! I never heard of anything more disgraceful in my life!" exclaimed Mrs. Seymour, in great excitement and indignation, when she concluded. "I can hardly credit the story! Hubert has never seemed like one so devoid of principle! He has been so good to us, so invariably respectful and circumspect—so thoughtful of our comfort, and forgetful of his own. Are you sure that this girl has not been imposing upon you?"

"Yes, mamma, I am sure," Helen returned, with quiet positiveness; "she has told me things, about

Hubert, you know, which prove her story to be true, and which she could have known nothing about if she were an impostor. I am convinced that she is a dear sweet, honest little woman, in spite of her one mistake, and you will feel the same, too, after you have seen and talked with her."

"Oh, this is dreadful! I do not know what to say—what to think!" exclaimed Mrs. Seymour in deep distress, for she had trusted the young man fully, and it was a terrible blow to find that she had been so deceived—her confidence so misplaced.

"Dearest, I am sorry for only one thing—excepting, of course, the fact that he has been guilty of such wrong—and that is, the disappointment to you—the impossibility, apparently, of carrying out our plans," said the heavy-hearted girl, as she pressed her tremulous lips against the thin cheek nearest her. "I have not a single regret, as far as I am, personally, concerned; I am, in fact, most thankful that I am once more free, for, of course, I could never marry Hubert after this."

"Of course not," was the indignant protest. "Why, I would rather die a thousand deaths than see you the wife of such a man! You do seem to be glad of the release, Helen," she added, bending a searching look upon the fair, sweet face resting against her shoulder. "Then—you did not love him, after all!"

"No, mamma——"

"And you were going to marry him simply to—to try to save me?" and the woman's voice broke, ending in an uncontrollable sob.

"Mamma, don't! You are all that I have in the world to live for, and I could sacrifice anything—everything—to keep you with me," Helen pleaded in self-defense, as she strained her emaciated form convulsively to her. Then she added in an almost defiant tone: "But I will save you, even yet. Hark!" she

suddenly interposed, and sitting erect; "there is the bell—they have come!"

"Let them come," said Mrs. Seymour, with sternly compressed lips. "I am ready for them, and Hubert will soon learn what I think of him!"

"Mamma," Helen gravely observed, and laying an impressive hand upon her shoulder, "I shall bring the clergyman here, for you to entertain—only please do not say anything to him about this until I return—while I have a talk with Hubert first. I have something very important to say to him, aside from the question of his hypocrisy toward us; you can guess, perhaps, what I intend to make him do, if I can."

"Helen! You are going to make him consent—you—you mean to——" began her mother breathlessly, as she comprehended her intention.

"Yes—yes; but I must go," and, springing to her feet, the girl bounded to the tube in the hall.

"Who is it, please?" she questioned, but with a sense of suffocation from the rapid beating of her heart, for she shrank from the dénouement which she knew must come.

"It is I—Hubert," came the reply from below.

"Come up," she returned, pressing the button; then opened the hall door, and stood awaiting, white and cold, the appearance of the ascending visitors, for she had caught the sound of other footsteps besides those of the unsuspecting young man, who was running lightly up the stairs, smiles of hope and triumph wreathing his lips.

Presently, Hubert sprang upon the landing, and behind him followed the more sedate figure of the clergyman.

He came eagerly forward, his whole face beaming with joyous anticipation, and put out both hands to Helen; for, in spite of the almost severe simplicity of her attire, she had never looked more lovely to him.

But she drew back, grave and unresponsive, and though a trifle wounded by her coldness, he innocently attributed her manner to her shyness in the presence of a stranger.

Yet, a second glance at her frozen face and averted eyes smote him with a sudden sense of dread of he knew not what.

But he stepped one side, to allow his companion to enter before him, saying, as he did so:

"Miss Seymour, allow me to present Beverend Mr. Hervey to you."

Helen gave the gentleman her hand with a quiet "Good morning, sir," then added courteously:

"Will you allow me to take you to mamma for a few moments, Mr. Hervey, while I speak with Mr. Alton?"

The clergyman affably signified his willingness to accede to her request, whereupon she led the way to the parlor, presented him to her mother, then excused herself, and returned to Hubert, who had remained standing in the hall, where he was vaguely wondering what Helen could wish to say to him.

He had intended getting there somewhat earlier, but he had been obliged to wait a little for Mr. Hervey, who had been delayed by another couple, who had come to be married, and he had become a trifle nervous and impatient, in view of the delay, and was now very eager to have the ceremony that would make Helen irrevocably his over with as soon as possible.

"Helen," he began eagerly, as she came to his side, "how love——"

"Come in here, please," she interposed, with a shiver of repugnance at the compliment he had half voiced.

She laid her hand upon the knob of her chamber door as she spoke, swung it open, and motioned him to enter, which he did, mechanically, with his eyes fastened upon her. He was dazed at the strangeness of her manner.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN EXCITING INTERVIEW.

HELEN followed the young man into the room, softly closing the door after her, and at that instant Hubert became conscious of another presence there.

His startled eyes swept the slight form sitting beside the bed from head to foot; then the sweet, anxious face, as it was turned slowly toward him, embracing in the glance the tiny sleeper among the pillows, and a terrible shock went quivering through every nerve of his body.

"May! My God!" was the horrified exclamation that burst involuntarily and hoarsely from him.

Then an angry fire leaped into his eyes, an ugly frown settled upon his brow, as the full significance of the situation flashed upon him, and striding to the girl's side, he grasped her rudely by the arm, and shook her savagely.

"Have you dared to come here to tell her?" he demanded fiercely, and without pausing to consider how his own words condemned him.

Quick as a flash, Helen sprang before him, with uplifted hand and dauntless bearing.

"Release her!" she commanded imperiously, and with flashing eyes. "Do not add cowardly insult to the terrible wrong that you have already done her. Of course she 'told me,'" she continued, her delicate nostrils dilating with ineffable scorn, "and I cannot be too thankful to her for saving me from a fate that would have been worse than a thousand deaths to

me; for, if I had learned the truth too late—after I had become irrevocably bound to you—I should not only have despised you beyond the power of words to express, but should have felt myself irreparably contaminated and degraded by my association with and bondage to you.”

The young man's grasp had involuntarily relaxed, and his hand fell nervelessly at his side at her command, while he cringed like a whipped cur beneath her scathing words.

“By heaven, Helen, but you are hard on a fellow!” he said in a tone and with an air of sullen shame, his face, even to his lips, almost as colorless as the immaculate tie which he had donned for his wedding.

“Hard!” she repeated, and the single word, with the contemptuous intonation she employed, stung him even more keenly than the scathing words she had previously uttered.

“You little know how I have loved—how I love you now,” he returned, with a shrill break in his voice.

At his confession, May, who had started to her feet as he laid hold upon her, sank back upon her chair, with a moan of anguish.

But Helen, with a crimson spot now burning upon either cheek, flashed a blighting look of indignation upon him.

“Hubert Alton, do not dare to use that word in connection with me and in this presence!” she cried, with a gesture which included both the wronged girl and her innocent babe. “‘Love!’ I doubt if you have the slightest conception of the significance of the sacred word! Oh!” she went on in a grieved, shocked tone; “you cannot conceive what a shock I have experienced in learning what I have learned this morning, for I at least respected you, even if I could not confer upon you the deeper regard which you pretended to crave. I believed you honest and

sincere in what you had confessed for me—in your desire to befriend my mother in our extremity——”

“I was honest,” the young man passionately interposed. “I was sincere—I could not be fonder of Mrs. Seymour if she were my own mother—as I have told you many times; while, as for myself, Heaven knows—but you have forbidden me to speak of my regard for you.”

“Allow me to say I think your ideas of honor and rectitude are somewhat strained,” said Helen, with curling lips.

“What do you mean?” Hubert demanded, with a start and a flush of anger.

“I will tell you what she means,” May here interposed, with an air of determination; “she knows all the plot between you and Mr. Lancaster——”

“What!” cried Hubert, turning upon her, with a look of consternation, and feeling almost as if he had been shot through the heart.

“Yes,” the girl went on breathlessly; “I am going to conceal nothing; I found that letter from him in the pocket of your overcoat, one night when you were asleep at the house. I saw the corner of it sticking out—I was jealous of you, for I had seen you with Miss Seymour, and I imagined it might be from her. Then, last night, when you went to your desk to get me some money, you dropped the telegram from him.”

“Oh, curse you! You have, indeed, undone me!” Hubert broke forth in a frenzied tone, and he swung his hand aloft, as if he would strike her to the floor.

But Helen caught it with a grip the strength of which amazed him.

“Shame! Do not lower yourself still more in my esteem by such an inhuman exhibition of passion,” she said, as his muscles relaxed, and she released her hold upon him. “And do not blame her; it was the only right thing for her to do, to bring those evidences

of a base plot to me. She has done me the greatest service in her power, and I am under everlasting obligations to her, while she has just now shown a moral courage worthy of emulation in so bravely confessing her agency in this matter to you."

"Are not your own ideas regarding certain points of honor somewhat strained, Miss Seymour?" Hubert questioned, with a sarcastic snarl. "Stealing and reading other people's letters is not regarded as a very creditable thing to do."

"No; under ordinary circumstances, I admit that is not," was the quiet response. "But the honor and happiness of three human beings were involved in this instance, and Mary was perfectly justified in availing herself of the circumstances which threw the letter and telegram into her possession. I have them now—I have read both."

"You?" groaned the baffled schemer.

"Yes. I had a perfect right to do so, for were they not weapons aimed at me, to destroy my whole life? Of course," she went on, with a little less of severity, "I have no means of knowing how large was the bribe offered you by Mr. Lancaster to assist him in carrying out this plot, the purpose of which is now as clear as the day to me; but I assume that it must have been considerable. I can understand, Hubert, that it was a great temptation to you, and I feel that the man was really more culpable in offering it than you in yielding to it."

The young man dropped his head upon his breast.

He felt exceedingly small and mean, in view of the revelation of the conspiracy between Mr. Lancaster and himself.

At the same time, he was too loyal to his employer, besides having always entertained a great admiration for him, to wish to have him blamed and humiliated.

"Lancaster is not a bad man," he said, after a

moment of sullen silence. "He has always stood well, and been regarded as an exceptionally honorable gentleman."

"Indeed!" observed Helen in a voice of cold scorn.

"Well, he has," Hubert reasserted hotly. "He is a most philanthropic man, as well. He is always helping unfortunate youngsters like myself. His charities are enormous, and he is as tender-hearted as a woman—you would be amazed if you could know of the amount of good he has been doing for years and years. But—Rob is his idol, and, since you know so much, there is no use in beating about the bush—being determined that he should not marry, except in his own position in life, he has, perhaps—for once—made a mistake."

"That is a self-evident fact, and a very mild term by which to express his methods," said Helen in the same tone as before, and which cut her listener to the quick.

"Great Scott, Helen, how hard you can be when your ideas of right and wrong are rubbed the wrong way!" he exclaimed, flushing to his temples.

"Right is always right, and wrong is always wrong. Truth and error cannot mingle, and, when any one resorts to pernicious and underhanded means—regardless of the ruin and sorrow that must result to other lives—to carry a point, he or she certainly has no right to expect either the respect or esteem of high-minded and truth-loving people," Helen gravely and earnestly replied.

"Yes; I know that you are very rigid," said Hubert disconsolately, "and I suppose you will never forgive Lancaster, or me, either, for this affair."

Helen stood, silent and thoughtful, for a moment or two, and she looked very lovely in her pure-white dress, with that sweet, earnest expression on her delicate, refined face.

Presently, she lifted a clear, direct, searching glance to him.

"What my attitude toward Mr. Lancaster may be does not matter now; but do you really wish to be forgiven, Hubert?" she inquired.

"Surely, you do not need to ask me that," he responded in an eager but husky tone.

"Do you wish it enough to be tested?"

He searched her lovely face an instant; then, all unsuspecting of her intention, replied:

"Try me, and see."

"I will!" said Helen, with a sudden energy. "If you will do your duty—if you will marry this dear girl, whom you have so wronged, I will forgive you heartily, and do all in my power to help and encourage you both. Stay!" she interposed, throwing out her hand to check him when he started violently, and would have answered her hotly; "let me have my say out. You have done Mary Wadleigh the greatest wrong that a woman can suffer; you are the father of her child, and it is your sacred duty to throw around them both your tenderest care, and give them the protection of your name. Hubert, let me entreat—I beg—I implore you to do this!" she urged appealingly, and bending a pitying look upon the sad young mother, who was now weeping her heart out from mingled grief and gratitude.

"The clergyman is here," she hastened to add; "you can easily detain him while you get another license made out, and mamma and I will sanction the union with our presence, and be your firm, true friends for the future. Will you do it, Hubert?"

"No!" he burst forth fiercely, and frightfully pale from mingled rage and disappointment, for he had been taken aback by her proposition—he had been hoping for some concessions from her. "Do you imagine that I am going to be wheedled or driven into

any trap of this kind after the miserable trick which she has played upon me—coming here at this time, worming herself into your confidence and sympathy, stealing papers from me, in the sneaking way she did, upsetting my plans, and practically ruining me! Marry her? No! I wash my hands of her entirely from this moment!"

He turned, as he ceased pouring forth this angry tirade, and would have dashed from the room if Helen had not dexterously slipped in between him and the door, and confronted him with a sweet, solemn dignity that awed him, in spite of the furious passion he was in.

"Hubert Alton, where is your manhood?" she demanded in clarion tones. "Look at that helpless darling on the bed! Have you no affection for the child who owes its being to you? See her!" she went on, smiling involuntarily, as the little one at that instant opened her pretty eyes, glanced around the strange room, with a look of surprise, and then began to coo softly and contentedly to herself; "is she not lovely—the little innocent? Can you bear to think of having her grow up without a name—with the stigma for which you are responsible resting upon her throughout her whole life? Where are the gentleness, the kindness, the sympathy, and tenderness which for months you have manifested toward my mother and me? Surely, they belong to your own flesh and blood, if to any one, and I will not believe that they were all assumed—that you have no real, inherent manhood, but have been playing the hypocrite, merely to gain unworthy ends. Where is your fatherhood, Hubert? Think of your own mother—what if she had been left in such straits?"

"Helen, you will drive me mad!" cried the young man between his tightly locked teeth; but she had caught the look which he had shot at the crowing

little one, and which betrayed that he was not wholly indifferent to her infantile charms. "Let me go!" he added fiercely, reaching for the handle of the door; "let me go!"

"Then you will not do right?" persisted the dauntless girl, without moving from her place, while she held his eyes with a steadfast, reproachful glance.

"Let me—go!" he repeated doggedly, though falteringly, but dropping his head before her with a shame-faced air.

"Very well, then, go," she said, stepping out of his path, and opening the door for him. "It would have comforted me to know that I had not been wholly mistaken in you—that you had, perhaps, been tempted, for the hour, beyond your strength to resist, and were not lost to all honor and manhood. Since you have repudiated this girl, who should be your wife—who is your wife before Heaven—I will do what I can for her. I will try to repay some of the obligations which I have owed you, during the last year, by sharing my home—while I have one—with these two wronged ones, whom you wilfully desert. Now, go!" she concluded sternly, and pointing toward the hall.

The wretched fellow passed out, without a word, with bowed head and a ghastly face, opened the outer door, and was gone. As the latch clicked again into its socket, poor Mary Wadleigh, heart-broken, and deserted, fell, with a moan of anguish, prone upon the bed, clasping her child to her breast in abject despair.

Helen, although her own heart was wrung with pity for her, feeling that she would be better left alone until she could regain something of self-control, passed out of the room, and gently closed the door after her.

Going directly to the parlor, she approached the clergyman, who paused in his conversation, and regarded her with an affable smile.

"Mr. Harvey," she began, with evident embarrassment and flushing, but speaking with quiet dignity, "I regret that you should have been troubled to come here to-day, but circumstances have occurred this morning which have made it impossible for a marriage between Mr. Alton and myself to occur."

The gentleman started to his feet, and regarded her in blank astonishment for a moment.

Then his habitual composure returned, and a fine sense of delicacy prompted him to say, with the utmost courtesy:

"Ah, some unforeseen interruption, perhaps; but my coming here has been no trouble to me—a pleasure, rather, to have met you and your mother. Pray, can I be of any service to you before I go? If so, do not hesitate to command me."

He spoke gently, and with a look of sympathy in his kind eyes, for he saw, from Helen's white face and the tension under which she was plainly laboring, that something had gone terribly amiss.

"Thank you, sir," she replied, a trifle unsteadily, for his gentlemanly bearing and delicacy had touched her; "you are very kind, but our plans are all changed, and our trip to the country is—postponed, and we shall remain quietly here for the present."

"Mr. Alton——" the clergyman began, with some embarrassment.

"Mr. Alton has found it necessary to—to leave very suddenly," Helen interposed.

"Then, perhaps, I had better leave this with you," Mr. Hervey observed, after a moment of thought, as he drew an envelope from an inner pocket, and passed it to her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MR. BENYON.

HELEN colored violently as she took the envelope, and mechanically drew forth its contents, for she instinctively knew that it was the marriage license.

At the same instant, a greenback fell fluttering to the floor.

"Yes," she said, crumbling the piece of parchment in her hand, "I will take care of this; but"—stooping to recover the bill, which, she saw at a glance, was a ten-dollar note, and holding it out to him—"this, I am sure, belongs to you."

"Pardon me, Miss Seymour, it does not belong to me; I could not take it," said the clergyman, shrinking slightly. "I have earned no fee, and am not entitled to it."

"But your time—and you have been put to a great deal of trouble," Helen faltered with increasing embarrassment.

"My dear young lady, pray do not mention it," Mr. Hervey kindly returned, as he cordially extended his hand to her; "and, if you have any doubts regarding the money, I will commission you to use it for some charitable purpose; I am sure you can be trusted to dispense it wisely. Now, let me say good morning, and perhaps you will allow me to call upon you now and then—I assure you, it will afford me pleasure to do so."

Helen thanked him, with trembling lips, as she gave him her hand, and observed that she would be glad to see him at any time; while, with a sudden thrill,

she said to herself that Mary Wadleigh should have the ten-dollar bill, for it certainly belonged to her, if to any one.

Mr. Hervey then took leave of Mrs. Seymour, saying a few tactful words to her, after which he bowed himself out, Helen heaving a long sigh of relief as the door closed upon him.

Then she went back to her mother, whom, to her astonishment, she found perfectly calm and collected, and ready to talk over the exciting events of the last hour and a half.

They went over everything together, in a grave, matter-of-fact manner, and Mrs. Seymour's tenderest sympathies were enlisted for the unfortunate girl, who was at that moment, fighting out a terrible battle with herself in Helen's room.

"What an escape for you, my darling!" exclaimed the elder woman, as she kissed her fondly; "and how we have been deceived in Hubert! I cannot understand how any one can be so lost to honor and a sense of duty, though no one could be blamed for loving you," she concluded, with a tender smile.

Helen shivered slightly at her last words. Hubert might possibly be fond of her, but she believed that he had been influenced more by the love of money than by any true affection for her.

She resolved, however, that her mother should never learn that part of the story, for she well knew that it would only arouse bitter memories and a stronger antagonism than she yet had known against the author of it.

"Helen, that poor child must be looked after," Mrs. Seymour continued, with unusual energy for her; "how old is she, do you think?"

"Not more than eighteen or nineteen, I should say."

"Oh, to think of it! And she has a good home in Massachusetts. How unhappy her family must be

over her mysterious flight! Do you suppose she would go back to them if we advised her to do so?"

"No, mamma. She has no mother, you know, and she fears her father; she says that she will never let him know anything of her fate while this stain rests upon her. Yes, we will look after her—I have told her that we would, and have asked her to remain with us until Monday," Helen responded, and glad to see that her mother was forgetting herself and their own trouble in her sympathy for one of "these little ones."

"That was right, and just like your thoughtfulness for others," was the appreciative reply, "and we will try to comfort and cheer her as best we can. But"—glancing at the clock—"it is nearly one o'clock; let us have lunch now; then we will discuss some plan for her—as well as for ourselves"—this last with a sigh.

"Very well; it is all ready, you know, except making the tea," said Helen. "Let me take you to Mary, and you can get acquainted with her while I am doing that."

Mrs. Seymour arose, and followed her to her room, where they found Mary comparatively calm—although her face was still flushed and tear-stained—and quietly rocking her baby.

Helen introduced her mother; then, after playing with the little one a few moments, during which she whispered to Mary not to mention the letter and telegram, she left them together, while she went to make ready for lunch.

Pinning up her skirt, and tying a huge apron around her waist, she set about her duties with a lighter heart and step than she had known for more than a week. Oh, what an endless week it had seemed, with that awful bondage, which she had so much dreaded, to look forward to!

In less than fifteen minutes, all was ready—the

table having been laid and everything prepared for a nice meal before their anticipated departure for the station—whereupon she called her mother and Mary, thinking, as she showed the latter her seat, how strange was the fate that had ordered that Hubert Alton's victim should occupy it, instead of himself.

Both mother and daughter, ignoring their own anxieties, exerted themselves, with true hospitality, to make the unhappy stranger forget her sorrows, and feel that she was no longer friendless.

When the meal was over, Mary begged an apron, and insisted upon making herself useful; and Helen, knowing that she would feel more comfortable and at home to help, said that she would regard it as a favor if she would wash the few dishes and tidy the kitchen, as she was going out for awhile.

Then she informed her mother that she had some errands she wished to do—among other things, she would have to make provision for their stay in town over Sunday, as their larder was practically empty. So, donning her hat, she went forth upon her mission, her fertile brain having conceived a plan by means of which she hoped to tide over their present difficulties, although she would not reveal it, for fear it might not succeed, and thus add another disappointment to her dear one's heart.

She took a car going down-town, finally getting off at — Street, when she proceeded directly to Madison Avenue.

Passing down the street, she paused before No.—, which bore the name of Benyon on the silver plate on the door. She mounted the handsome marble steps, and rang the bell, for she had determined to seek the father of her old school friend, Hattie Benyon, make a plain statement of her troubles to him, with the hope that the good man would be able to suggest a way out of them.

Since the idea had flashed upon her, she wondered why she had not thought of it long ago.

She doubted if she would find the family at home, for she knew that they usually went early to their country home; but she hoped that Mr. Benyon might still be in the city. A servant answered her ring, and she inquired for the gentleman of the house.

Yes, the man said, he was in, and she was shown into a reception-room, leading out of the library, and where Mr. Benyon came to her presently, with the card she had sent still in his hand.

He greeted her with a cordial hand-shake and a genial smile that was like sunshine after rain to the heavy-hearted girl.

"I am very glad to see you, Miss Helen," he said heartily; "it is a long time since you have favored us in this way; but I am sorry to tell you that you have missed Hattie and the others; they went to Newport a week ago, and I am the only member of the family at home."

Helen informed him that, while she would have been glad to see Mrs. Benyon and the girls, her visit was to him exclusively, as she had come upon an urgent matter of business. Then she frankly stated to him the difficulties she and her mother were laboring under, telling him how all the savings of years had been lost, how Mrs. Seymour had been critically ill for many months, and that now her very life depended upon her having a decided change, and freedom from all care and anxiety.

"We have absolutely no money to make this change," Helen continued from this point. "Our expenses have been something frightful during mamma's sickness, and we are reduced to almost to our last available dollar. We have had to move from our former home on —th Street, to — Street. We own the furniture in this suite, and we have thought of

disposing of it, but mamma said a forced sale would be almost like throwing it away. We also own the cottage in the Adirondacks, which you have seen, and on which I have tried in vain to raise some money. The broker told me that he would eventually be able to negotiate a loan, but it was liable to take weeks—possibly months—meantime, our need is very pressing. As a last resort, I have come to you, hoping that you might be able to direct me either to mortgage or sell it to advantage.”

Mr. Benyon had listened attentively to her story, his kind face growing grave and tender from sympathy during the recital.

“You have had a hard time, Helen, that is a fact,” he said, with the utmost kindness, when she concluded,” and I wish you had come to me before. Why did you not, my child?”

Helen nearly broke down beneath his fatherly tone and manner; but, making a huge effort, she resolutely swallowed the lumps in her throat, though there were tears in her eyes, and replied: “To tell you the truth, I did not think of it,” she said tremulously; “we were so absorbed in trying to work our own way out of our difficulties, it did not occur to us to appeal to you.”

“I see, you are a couple of very independent individuals; but, my dear, you should have had a little more faith in your friends,” said the gentleman, in a tone of mild reproof, but smiling encouragingly into her white, anxious face. “Let me see, you say you own this cottage in the Adirondacks—do you own it clear?” he inquired, after a moment of thought.

“Yes; mamma bought the land several years ago, and, later, built the house to suit herself. It is very convenient, and nicely furnished—has six rooms, and is prettily, though not elegantly, furnished. Really, it is a beautiful summer home.”

"What value do you set upon it, just as it stands?" Mr. Benyon questioned.

"The house cost mamma about twenty-five hundred, and I believe there is five hundred dollars' worth of furniture in it. The land—but I have the deed of that here, and it will tell you what was paid for it, and also the number of feet in the lot," Helen replied, as she drew forth a folded document from her hand-bag, and passed it to her companion.

Mr. Benyon spread it out upon the table by which he was sitting, and examined it carefully.

"Six hundred dollars was what she gave for the land," he observed reflectively, after studying the paper for a few moments; "but, without doubt, it has increased in value since it was purchased. Now, do you think Mrs. Seymour would prefer to raise money on a mortgage, or to sell it outright?"

"I think she would wish to do whatever would be most advantageous. That is a point upon which I felt you could advise us better than any one else," Helen responded.

"If she should sell the property, have you any idea what she expects to realize upon it?"

"No," said the young girl thoughtfully; "but it seems to me that we ought to get at least what the place cost us, considering the increase of property in that region; and yet we are in such need of money, we cannot afford to be very arbitrary regarding the matter. My mother's health is of more importance than anything else just now. However, I am sure we can trust to your discretion, if you will kindly take the trouble to find a customer for us," she concluded, and lifting a confiding glance to him.

"Thank you, Helen, for your trust in me," Mr. Benyon genially responded, "and I promise you that I will do my best for you. I will think the matter over this afternoon, and see one or two clients who are in

search of something of the kind, then I will call and talk the business over more definitely with you and Mrs. Seymour this evening."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Benyon," said the fair girl eagerly, and in a more hopeful tone than she had yet spoken, for she was greatly comforted and encouraged by his ready sympathy and interest in her affairs. "I hope," she added, in sudden doubt, "that you will not disarrange any of your plans on our account."

"No, my dear; I am not going to Newport for another week yet, and can attend to this as well as not," was the smiling reply. "Now, about your suite," he resumed; "if you are going to leave the city, you would, no doubt, like to do something with that, also. We often have applications for furnished apartments, and, possibly, I might be able to subrent it for you just as it stands, if you would like, and thus make your furniture earn a little for you."

"That would be a very nice arrangement, Mr. Benyon, and such a relief, for the thought of packing and storing our furniture has seemed a great burden, to say nothing of the expense," and she smiled brightly up at her companion, for the first time during her call.

"Well, of course, I can advise you better about this matter after I have seen the suite, but it strikes me that it would be the wisest measure for you."

"I am sure it would," Helen replied, as she arose, "and I thank you more than I can express for your kindly interest in our troubles; it has lifted a terrible load from my heart just to talk with you."

She put out her hand to him, with an impulse of gratitude, as she spoke, and seemed very lovely, with that earnest look in her brown eyes and the flush of hope mantling her cheeks once more. At least, so thought an unsuspected witness of the scene, as he peered curiously into the room through an aperture in the

portières which separated the library from the reception-room.

Mr. Benyon took the small hand, and stroked it softly.

"Then, have a little more confidence in your friends, Miss Helen—don't forget us again," he smilingly returned.

He accompanied her to the door, where he bade her a cheerful *au revoir*, thus sending her on her way with a light heart and buoyant step; then he returned to the library, where he was confronted by a tall, handsome man, with iron-gray hair, but whose face was startlingly pale and drawn from some deep inward emotion.

"Great heavens, Wilton! What ails you, man? Are you ill?" cried Mr. Benyon, with a start and look of dismay, as he saw his friend's excited condition.

"No—no—not ill; but that girl's story has upset me completely; of course, I could not fail to hear every word she said, with only those portières between us."

"Yes, I knew you could not fail to overhear the conversation; but, surely, it need not have disturbed you to such an extent! Do you know Helen Seymour?" Mr. Benyon questioned, with manifest surprise.

"I—I have met her," replied his companion, with lips that were absolutely colorless.

"John, what is the matter? You are white as a ghost? Sit down, man, and compose yourself," said his host, wheeling a chair toward him, while he studied his face with mingled concern and curiosity.

"Thanks, Benyon," he returned, as he sank into the chair, and wiped the beads of perspiration from his forehead. "I have rather lost my nerve, I own; but—you see—I knew the girl's mother years ago; was—quite interested in her at one time. Great heavens!

to think that she has been reduced to such poverty again, and is so seriously ill, besides!"

"Ah!" was all that Mr. Benyon felt at liberty to reply; but he was beginning to understand some things which had heretofore puzzled him in connection with his friend's sad and lonely life.

"Yes; I suppose I may as well confess to you, old boy—since I have betrayed so much," said John Wilton, after a thoughtful silence, "that in the long ago, she was the only woman in the world to me. But—I can't go into details, even to you, my friend; there was a misunderstanding, and—we were estranged—separated."

"Yes, John, I understand," replied Mr. Benyon, in a tone that was tender as a woman's.

"I know something about that property up in the Adirondacks," Mr. Wilton resumed, after another pause, and speaking with more of his accustomed energy. "I was up in that locality last year. I will buy it, Benyon," he went on, with repressed excitement; "buy it, you understand, for I could never take the interest on a mortgage from her. Offer them five thousand dollars for it—six—anything you like; the more, the better, only they mustn't suspect who the purchaser is—call me Jones, Smith, or Brown, anything you choose. Then, there is that suite they are living in—that was a clever suggestion to sublet. Now, I want a place to stay in, during my frequent visits to the city. Hire it of them, and offer them just as much for it as you think will do, without arousing their suspicions that any interested party is concerned. Only, being a single man, I'd like to have some one there to keep the place in order for me, and feed me when I'm in town. Possibly, they will know of some one—anyhow, fix the matter up so that they can have all the money they need at once, and get that sick woman into the country without delay. I

give you carte blanche, and you know money is no object to me—I have no one to spend it on, save myself,” he concluded moodily.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE COUNTRY.

"YES, old friend, I am sure I understand what you want, and you may trust me to do my best to carry out your wishes," Mr. Benyon observed, with a feeling of deep sympathy, for he saw that the man was greatly unnerved. "It will prove a godsend, too, to Mrs. Seymour and her daughter, for I could see that the girl was almost desperate when she came to me. Mrs. Seymour is a beautiful woman, both in person and character, and, Wilton, perhaps——"

"Don't!" interposed his guest, throwing out his hand, with a despairing gesture; "the past is past for us, and there is no hope for me—that I know."

"Pardon me, John; I should have known better than to meddle," said Mr. Benyon apologetically; "but we have known the Seymours for a long time; my Hattie and Helen were schoolmates, and very fond of each other. Helen is a lovely and talented girl—indeed, both she and her mother are cultivated ladies, fit to shine even in the circles of the four hundred. They used to have a very handsome apartment in ——th Street, elegantly furnished, too; but they must have become very much reduced to have had to move to where they are now located. It is respectable enough, but I know the house; it is very cheaply constructed, and the suites very small."

John Wilton—for, doubtless, he has been recognized as the man who had come so suddenly upon Mrs. Seymour in that pretty glade in the Adirondacks the summer before—barely suppressed a groan, in

view of the desperate condition of the woman he loved. But he quickly recovered himself, and remarked:

"Well, go ahead with this business—settle it to-night, if possible. I'll take possession of the flat as soon as they can get out, and pay the rent in advance. If you cannot draw up the deed for the cottage this evening—provided they are willing to sell it—just give them five hundred dollars, to bind the bargain, so that they can have plenty of money to meet the exigencies of their case; and—and find out, if you can, where they are going for the summer."

"All right; I will obey your directions to the letter, if I can," returned his friend, adding, as he glanced at his watch: "And now, I think we had better have our interrupted drive in the park."

"Very well; I'd like to get out where I can breathe more freely," said Mr. Wilton, smiting his chest, as if he were oppressed by a crushing weight; "but," he added, "I'm mighty glad we were not gone when she came."

Mr. Benyon did not respond, but touched an electric button, to summon a servant.

"Peters," he said to the man who presently appeared, "we are ready for the carriage now; order it to the door right away."

Five minutes later, the elegant turnout, with coachman and footman in livery on box, and containing the two old college chums and lifelong friends, was rolling up-town toward Central Park.

That same evening, about eight o'clock, Mr. Benyon presented himself in Mrs. Seymour's modest but tastefully furnished apartment, and greeted her with the same cordial courtesy that he would have accorded one of the "four hundred," with whom he was accustomed to mingle.

He was greatly shocked, although he was careful to

conceal the fact, at the change in Mrs. Seymour, and feared that his assistance had been solicited too late to be of any practical benefit to her.

Both Helen and her mother were reduced almost to the verge of tears when he informed them of his unexpected success in finding an immediate purchaser for their cottage.

"Mr. Jones knows all about property in that region," he quietly observed, when they expressed their surprise, in view of the price that had been offered them—five thousand five hundred dollars, and five hundred more for the furniture. "He is very glad to secure the place, and claims that it is sure to rise in value."

"Oh, what a relief this is, mamma!" exclaimed Helen in tremulous tones, but with shining eyes, "for now we can carry out our plans for the summer without any fears for the future, and the price surely is very satisfactory."

"Y—es," said Mrs. Seymour reflectively. She was thinking, with her business propensity, that, if the property was "sure to rise in value," she would like the benefit of that rise herself. "Did you ask Mr. Jones if he would take a mortgage on the place?" she inquired of Mr. Benyon.

The gentleman smiled; it was so like human nature to overestimate one's possessions, especially when some one else was desirous of securing them.

"Yes; a mortgage was suggested, but Mr. Jones does not care to invest his money in that way; he prefers to become the owner," he returned. "I assure you, Mrs. Seymour, he has made you an extremely advantageous offer and you will make a great mistake if you do not close with it immediately. He wishes to secure possession at once, and authorized me to pay over to you five hundred dollars to-night to bind the bargain. How shall I give it to you—in money, or the form of a check?"

"Mamma!" cried Helen in an anxious tone, as she observed the thoughtful look in her face; "surely, you are not going to reject this offer?"

"No, dear," the woman replied, with a sigh; "but do not blame me for not being too eager to accept it, for, you know, I planned and watched the construction of our little mountain home, and we have spent some ideal summers there, so every nail and shingle is dear to me. But," with a renunciatory shrug, "it will have to go; and, as I think it would be unwise to have so much money in the house, I think, Mr. Benyon, you may give me a hundred dollars in bills and the remaining four hundred in a check on some bank here in New York."

"I think that is a wise decision," said the gentleman, as he drew forth his pen and check-book, whereupon he wrote a check for the amount he had named, and then counted out ten ten-dollar bills, and handed them to her, remarking, as he did so: "The deed I will attend to drawing up on my return this evening, and bring around for you to sign before you leave town."

Helen's face was radiant when this business was completed, and she laughed out, like a happy child, as she brought her mother her almost empty purse, in which to place the crisp, new bills she had just received.

"Oh, Mr. Benyon," she said, "you cannot imagine how rich I feel, with all this money, nor how grateful I am to you for your agency in bringing us such good fortune."

"And you cannot imagine, Miss Helen, how happy I am to be the instrument in thus contributing to your welfare," the gentleman smilingly replied. "Now, about your suite," he resumed, and glancing appreciatively around the pretty parlor. "I know of a party—a single man—who wants just such a place as this—a small apartment of four or five rooms,

comfortably furnished, as a sort of refuge when he comes to the city. He comes and goes, sometimes remaining here two or three weeks at a time, and I am sure he will take it, on my approval; only he said he should need some trusty person to look after his comfort when he is here, and keep the rooms in order while he is away. Perhaps you may know of some one whom you could recommend, and it would be a fine chance for the right person; of course, the wages would not be very much, but the woman would have her rent and living, and not so much to do, for she would be alone considerably. The gentleman, Mr. Smith, dislikes hotel life exceedingly, and that is why he wants the freedom of a place of his own while he is in the city."

Helen started and flushed while he was talking, for a happy thought had occurred to her.

"Oh, mamma, do you suppose Mary Wadleigh would do?" she questioned eagerly when Mr. Benyon paused.

"I am afraid the baby would be an objection," replied Mrs. Seymour doubtfully.

"A baby—bless me!" exclaimed Mr. Benyon in a no less doubtful tone, as he thought of his dignified and fastidious friend having his slumbers disturbed at night by the cries of an infant.

"Ah, but this is such a good baby," pursued Helen; "and Mary is so scrupulously neat in her own appearance and the care of her child. I feel sure she would make a nice housekeeper. It would be just the place for her, and she needs a home so much. I wish the arrangement could be made."

Then, in her enthusiasm over the idea, she launched forth upon Mary's story, describing how, with her little one to provide for, she had been thrown upon her own resources, and was nearly discouraged with the battle of life.

She did not go into details regarding certain facts of her history, for she wished to shield the girl all that was possible; but she told enough, and told it so well and so delicately, that her kind-hearted listener's sympathies were fully enlisted.

He said that he would consult the gentleman who was to take the suite, and, if he would consent to give the young woman a trial, he would let them know the result when he came to have them sign the deed on Monday morning.

"Perhaps you would like to see Mary?" Helen suggested. "She came to us to-day, and we are going to keep her until Monday."

"Yes," Mr. Benyon said, "I would like to ask her a few questions—that is, if you think she would like the position."

So Helen went to Mary, who had been rocking her little one to sleep in her chamber.

She told her of the plan that had been talked over, and the girl was almost overcome with joy and gratitude, in view of the delightful prospect suggested to her.

"Ah, Miss Seymour, it would seem almost like heaven to me to have a pretty home like this, after living in one poor little room in a miserable lodging-house," she said, with starting tears. "How more than good you are to me!" she resumed brokenly. "Why cannot everybody be kind to girls who have been unfortunate, and so lift them up, rather than trample them down? I shall love you all my life for your goodness to me to-day."

"A true man or woman will always be kind, and try to encourage those who wish to retrieve themselves. I sometimes think that those who trample them down, as you express it, have something in their own lives to conceal, and feel that they can bolster themselves up in that way," said Helen

gravely. "But tell me," she added, "can you cook nicely?"

"Yes. I went to a cooking-school for a year before I—I left home. I can make almost anything, and I dearly love the care of a house," returned Mary, with an eager light in her eyes.

"Well, come and talk with Mr. Benyon, and we will hope that the gentleman who is going to live here while we are away will at least give you a trial."

So the girl went with her to be interviewed by Mr. Benyon, who, when he saw how young and attractive she was, surmised something of her sad history.

She was the very pink of neatness, as far as her own personal appearance went, and, seeing that she had been well reared, his own heart was touched by her misfortunes, and he resolved to influence his friend to try her for a while as a housekeeper.

He knew that he would spend but comparatively little of his time in the city, especially during the summer months; that he had hired the suite more for the sake of assisting the woman whom he had loved in his youth than because he really wanted to live there, and, being possessed of ample means, he could well afford to give this stranded waif a home, and so help on the good work which Mrs. Seymour and her daughter had begun.

"Could you come immediately?" he inquired, as he arose to go, after putting a few practical questions to her.

"I should be very glad to, sir," Mary quietly replied.

"Then I will bring the gentleman here as soon as you leave for the country," said Mr. Benyon, turning again to Mrs. Seymour, "and——"

"But, Mr. Benyon," Helen here laughingly interposed, "you have not yet seen the suite, excepting this one room. How can you recommend it to your client?"

"Well, I confess, I have not been very business-

like," was the smiling reply; "but," his glance roving appreciatively around the pretty parlor, "I took it for granted that this was a fair sample of the whole."

"Come and see—I really think you ought, in justice to the new tenant," said Helen, and she led the way into an adjoining room, and so through the whole apartment, which was attractive and immaculate in every nook and corner.

"Well, I am sure Mr. Smith can be made very comfortable here," Mr. Benyon remarked, adding: "When may I tell him that he can have possession?"

"We have the refusal of rooms at Yonkers, and I will telegraph Mrs. Knight to-morrow morning that she may expect us on the afternoon train on Monday."

"Very well; I will see you again on Monday morning, when we will settle all these matters," Mr. Benyon observed, then bade them good evening, and departed.

He came, as he had promised, on Monday, and quite early.

"Mr. Smith" had agreed to take the suite, and sent the first month's rent in advance. Mary was to remain, to have charge of the rooms, and, if arrangements could be made to accommodate her, Mr. Smith wished to have a poor girl—Alice Kimball by name—whom he was educating, make one of the family.

She was a nice girl of seventeen, he said, and was going to be a teacher; she would be company for Mary evenings, and could help about the house on days when there was no school.

Mrs. Seymour said the matter of accommodation could be easily arranged—the baby could occupy the crib, the two girls could share Helen's room, and she expressed herself as very much pleased that Mary would have a companion near her own age to keep her from brooding over her troubles.

The deed of transfer was then signed, the price of

the cottage paid over, after which Mr. Benyon took leave of Helen and her mother, wishing them a pleasant summer, then went his way.

There was a general rejoicing in the little suite after his departure, for the hearts of the three women were very light after the darkness and gloom of the last year.

Mary was sent to her lodgings, to have her few belongings removed to her new home, and, upon her return, she went about the house with elastic step and shining eyes, intent upon her new duties, and waiting upon Mrs. Seymour, while Helen went to deposit her small fortune in a bank which Mr. Benyon had recommended as being perfectly reliable.

She was back again in time for lunch, and then at two o'clock a carriage came to take her and her mother, with their trunks, to the station.

They took a friendly leave of Mary, with wise counsels and good wishes, instructing her to appeal to them whenever she needed advice, or in any emergency; then, with a sense of freedom long unknown, they turned their faces toward the country, and away from all care and worry.

The further events which befel the various characters in this story and Helen's final victory are fully recorded in the sequel to this volume entitled "Love's Conquest" published uniform with this volume.

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